

A TEI Project

Interview of Grace Montañez Davis

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1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 (August 26, 2008)

Espino

This is Virginia Espino, and I'm interviewing Grace Montañez Davis at her home in Highland Park, California, on August 26, 2008.

Espino

Grace, let's start with your parents. Can you tell me their names and then move on to where they were born?

Davis

Okay. My father's name was Alfredo [Viallescua] Montañez. I think that Viallescua or something was his middle name. My mother was Belen Mendoza Montañez. Both of them were from Chihuahua, Mexico.[recording interruption]

Espino

Okay, Grace, you were telling me where your parents were born.

Davis

In Chihuahua. Santa Rosalia de Camarco, Chihuahua, México. My grandfather was a landowner. He had a ranch and cattle, and grew tobacco and cotton and things.

Espino

Your father's father.

Davis

My father's father, yes. And my mother, her father was a Tarahumara Indian, and they lived, I guess, just in the town. My mother went to school up through elementary school. My father always said he didn't go to school, but my mother said he was in school in the lower grades. When they came to Mexico after we were born, they went to school here to learn English and become citizens.

Espino

You mean when they came to the United States [California] from Mexico--

Davis

Yes, yes.

Davis

--they went to school in--

Espino

Not right away, but after they were married and had children.

Espino

Did they marry in Chihuahua?

Davis

In Fresno. No, they married in Fresno. My mother was taking care of her nephew [Conrad Lucio Mendoza], second nephew, actually. His father was her nephew. His mother died during the flu epidemic [in New Mexico, 1918], and my mother was taking care of him. She wasn't married. His father was in

Fresno. He worked as a barber, and he sent for my mother and his son, so they came to Fresno and were there with my--I used to call him an uncle, but he was really a cousin.

Espino

What year was this? Do you remember?

Davis

No.

Espino

You said that was the flu epidemic of--

Davis

In 1918. Yes, so it was soon after that. They didn't get married until about--let's see. They had my brother, Jesús [2 years older], was born before they were married, and that always bothered my brother, I remember. But they got married in Fresno and lived there for a while, and then they came back to Los Angeles and lived here.

Espino

So your father went to look for your mother in Fresno because she--

Davis

Yes. He came to visit his sister in Blythe, California, and in fact, he told his father that he was coming to visit his sister, and he did, but then he scooted on to Fresno to find my mother. She was five years older than my father, but I don't know anything about their life before we were born, but I know that the baby that she had been taking care of, she brought him with her. She was still taking care of him after she was married, and lived with my mother and father. His name was Conrad Lucio Mendoza, and I always called him Louis and called him my brother because he lived with us all his life except the time that he went to high school.

Davis

He went to Lincoln High School, and he went to live--his father wanted him to live with him and his wife who he had married. Mary Mendoza was her name.

My brother went to live with them for the four years that he went to school. But the night he graduated, I remember that my mother--there was a neighbor who had a car, and he drove my mother and my father to the high school for the graduation, and we stayed at some neighbor's house. Well, when they came back, my brother was sitting on the porch with all his belongings and he said, "They wanted me to stay with them while I went to school. I'm finished with school. I want to come back to my mother."

Espino

Did you have other siblings?

Davis

Two brothers, one just two years older than I and another one younger than myself, Rudy, Rodólofo.

Espino

Jesús was the older brother--

Davis

He was the older brother. When he was little, he got tuberculosis. One of my father's sister [Merced], who lived here, had tuberculosis, and my brother Jesús got the disease, and they took him away to Olive View Sanitarium, and he lived there all his life till he was about twelve. I don't know how old he was when he went, but I know the health department used to review us every year to make sure we didn't have tuberculosis. I used to have a scar from three injections; they're finally gone.

Davis

We lived in Lincoln Heights. Let's see--I'm trying to remember the street. I think it was Avenue 18, and we lived in The Courtyard. We lived in one of the house way in the back. It's still there. They remodeled it and put the entrance on the front, and it used to be on the side when we lived there. I was born there, and my brother Jesús was also--no, he was born in Fresno. I was delivered by a county hospital doctor, who, because I was born on Thanksgiving Day, he named me Grace, and my parents accepted that.

Espino

So you were born at home, or were you born in the county hospital?

Davis

At home. No, at home. They used to come to the house when you were sick in those days.

Espino

The county doctors would do home visits.

Davis

Yes, they did, because I remember we moved from Avenue 18. No, actually, we stayed on Avenue 18. We just moved further down the street near Mozart Street. My mother, I think she had miscarriages. I don't really remember, but the doctor from the county hospital came to see her.

Davis

I vividly remember one time, and my brother Rudy was--no, he wasn't born there. We moved around the corner to Mozart Street, and he was born there.

Espino

Can you describe for me the neighborhood that you grew up in? Did it have paved streets?

Davis

Yes, they had paved streets. It was predominantly Italian, and even the priest at Our Lady of Help Christians, which was the parish, were all Italian. They used to have processions in honor of Our Lady through the streets, and I remember we used to wait to see them, and they used to collect money from all the people who was watching, and would pin it on the cape that they used to put on the Blessed Mother [at Our Lady of Help Christians]. They had all kinds of dollars. Everybody gave something.

Espino

How would you describe the relationship with your family and your Italian neighbors?

Davis

I remember when we lived across the street from the Albion Street School, which is where I was born. Everybody who lived in the court was Mexican, and my mother used to send me to the store, which was just down on the corner, and the Italian kids used to harass me and chase after me and break my bottle of milk that I bought. So my mother used to have to stand on the sidewalk in front of the court and watch me while I went up to the store and back. Then when we moved down the street on Avenue 18, it was a duplex, and I remember that the neighbors who lived there, the Immigration came in the middle of the night and took them away and took a mattress with them. We were peeking out the front window, and I remember seeing that.

Davis

Then when we moved to Mozart, the landlady of that place--I don't remember who the landlords were before, but she was an Italian and lived on Avenue 18. She had a house there, and she owned the house where we lived. Her yard went all the way back so that it was contiguous to our yard, and I do remember her name was Rosalia. She used to make wine every year, and she would get my father, and there was another man who had a business around Main Street, but for some reason he and my father used to help her make wine. I don't know if she paid them or not, but I know they used to drink the year before wine, and my mother used to get all upset because they would party after they made the wine. I don't know if they got drunk or not, but she used to tell them about that. But every year they did that.

Espino

So do you think that the family next to you who was taken away, do you think that was an eviction, or what do you think that--

Davis

That was an Immigration--

Espino

That was part of the repatriation?

Davis

Yes. They just came in. Why they didn't bother us, I don't know. When we lived on Avenue 18 and across from the school, I remember my father was

working on the fields, and he would go one week to work on the fields and one week to stay home, and he would bring home whatever he was picking, grapes, which was a real treat. I remember I used to put them underneath my pillow to try to keep them away from my brothers.

Davis

The house there in The Courtyard, it didn't have a bathroom, but it had a toilet, but you had to go outside on the porch to go to the toilet. We used to take a bath on Saturdays in the washtub. I remember my mother would move aside the table, and we didn't have electricity. We had a lamp, and she would give us a bath in the tub, washtub. I also remember that she used to clear away everything and teach me to dance the Mexican dances, El Caballito Blanco. She also was trying to teach me to be an orator or to speak publicly. She used to have me read a column from La Opinión. I remember the man's name was Naranjo, and I guess she learned when she was going to school, so this was part of the culture that she was trying to teach me.

Espino

So just getting back a little bit to how your Italian neighbors related to you as a Mexican, in some cases you described that the kids would be mean to you, but in other cases you think that some of the adults worked well together or supported each other?

Davis

When we moved to Mozart, we didn't have problems with the Italians. Most of them lived across the street. They all used to have the same Saint Joseph altar tables every year in honor of St. Joseph, and they used to cook for weeks before in order to put the food on the table. It was also during the time of the war [World War II], and we had coupons for sugar and stuff, and I know my mother used to share with the Italian ladies so that they could have sugar to make the goodies for the table. We used to go all around the neighborhood, all the way for blocks, going from house to house, looking at the altars.

Espino

They put them outside there?

Davis

No, in the house. In the house there was the table with an altar. We used to get along okay with them. I don't remember--the only time I do remember, during the war my sister-in-law, my brother Louis' wife, Mary, had a baby girl, Connie, and she was working in the shipyards and used to bring the baby to my mother, and she was taking care of the baby. She was a young little girl. Well, she used to go to play with the landlord's grandchildren at their house, and they were getting along okay, except one time, I don't know what happened, but she came home crying. I was already in high school, and I remember that I went to the house and knocked on the door to complain about whatever they had done to my niece. They listened to me. I don't remember if they denied anything or anything, but--

Espino

You don't remember what had happened to her, but something?

Davis

No, just playing with her, because I remember there was another time--maybe it was the same time, because I remember really speaking up for my niece, and her mother, who was the landlady's daughter, is the one I spoke to. I remember saying that I would report her to the authorities if anything else happened. But she never played with them anymore, and someone else was taking care of her later, you know.

Espino

So what kind of work did your parents do? Did your mother stay at home?

Davis

My mother never worked. During the war, I remember, she used to iron for the neighbors, the men's--she used to iron shirts that were perfect, and the neighbors used to pay her--I think in those days they paid her fifteen cents a shirt, but it was money. She never worked. My father never wanted her to work. When she was up in Fresno, I know she worked a while in the canneries, but that was before she had any children. But my father never let her work.

Davis

He worked as a gardener. I remember the man, whoever he was, he used to come and pick him up very early in the morning when it was still dark, and he

went working as a gardener. He worked--I don't remember what came first, but a couple of blocks away on Avenue 17 there was a dye company. They dyed tablecloths, carpets, and my father worked there, and my brother Louis worked there, and I worked there one summer when I was just starting high school. I was cutting. The tablecloths were in a roll. They used to dye them that way. Then they used to stitch them in another part on Main Street, and my father got me a job there. I was paid thirty-five cents an hour.

Espino

About how old do you think you were at the time?

Davis

In high school.

Davis

About sixteen?

Davis

Probably fifteen or sixteen. I remember my father was very proud when I got my first check. I gave it to him, but he insisted that I keep it.

Espino

So when you were younger and growing up, what was the language that you used at home?

Davis

Spanish.

Espino

So when you were born, the doctor named you Grace.

Davis

Grace.

Espino

But did your parents call you Grace?

Davis

Gracia. Yes, Graciela or Altagracia. People were always trying to call me something else, but they called me Grace. I remember my brother Louis used to insist that we speak Spanish to our parents and not mix English into it. He used to tell us to describe what we were trying to say in Spanish. We talked to each other in English, but always Spanish to my parents. Even after they went to school and became citizens, we still spoke Spanish, although they understood some. And I remember when people came to knock on the door, we would hide so my mother would have to speak English. But we spoke Spanish at home.

Espino

Do you think that you were speaking English when you started elementary school, or do you think you only spoke Spanish?

Davis

Well, yes, because I was speaking to my brothers.

Espino

So that helped you to--

Davis

Yes. I remember going to nursery school, and I had an ulcer in my eye, and my father used to take me to the General Hospital. I remember sitting in a dark room where they used to look at the eye, and the only thing I remember is that they gave me cod liver oil to take all the time, and I used to hate it. It was like a chocolate mixture, but it still didn't taste good to me.

Davis

Once I was trying to use the excuse of my eye for not going to school, and I don't remember what argument I got into with my father, but he ended up chasing me. Behind the house there was a big lot full of what we called--I don't remember now. There was a green leaf thing that my mother used to use to give us--oh, not laxatives, but--

Espino

I'm going to pause just a second, because your microphone fell off.[recording interruption]

Espino

Okay, do you want to finish your story?

Davis

Well, he chased me all around the lot, and when he caught me, he spanked me and made me go to school. They were very strict about going to school. Even later I remember when I was a young girl, and I used to try to get out of going to school because I had cramps, and my mother never let me stay home for cramps. She gave me aspirin or something and made me go.

Espino

So when you were in elementary school, those were the years of the repatriation and the depression, historic moments for people in the United States. Do you remember how that impacted your family? You described one--

Davis

We used to be afraid that they might come and get us, too, but they never did. I also remember my brother's father, my cousin--Conrado was his name--and Mary used to belong to--[End of recording]

1.2. Session 2 (September 5, 2008)

Espino

This is Virginia Espino. I'm interviewing Grace Montañez Davis at her home in Highland Park, Los Angeles, California, on September 5, 2008.

Espino

Grace, last time we were talking we had a little technical snafu, so we're going to go back and talk about your early childhood, probably when you were in elementary school.

Davis

Okay.

Espino

I want to ask you about an incident that you mentioned regarding your neighbors, who one day were taken away with their mattress. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Davis

We had just moved to this house down on Avenue 18, and it was a duplex, and there was another family living on the other side of us, so we pretty much could hear what was going on next-door. So one night around midnight or so we heard this tremendous commotion, and we looked out the front door, and the family was being led out with their mattress. I don't know why they took the mattress. But they went away, and we were afraid that it would happen to us next. But we never had immigration bother us.

Espino

Did your neighbors ever come back?

Davis

No.

Espino

Did you ever find out what happened to them?

Davis

No, not at all.

Espino

Do you remember how many people lived in that house?

Davis

No.

Espino

But you said that you were afraid.

Davis

Yes. We thought somebody [Immigration] would come in the middle of the night and take us away. Both my parents later on became citizens. They went to school to learn English.

Espino

At this time, during the immigration raids, your parents were not citizens?

Davis

No, they were not.

Espino

Do you think that it was a time of economic hardship, and a lot of people were accepting government aid?

Davis

It was in the thirties, so we were having a bad time, too.

Espino

Do you remember that your family used any government assistance?

Davis

Well, I don't know how, but I know it must have been government issued, but my father went to work out in the fields one week, and then he would stay home another week. Then the following week he would go. Because I know he would bring us grapes and lettuce and things that he had been picking, so it was a real treat to get grapes. I used to hide them under my pillow.

Espino

Do you think that he was considered himself part of the Bracero Program?

Davis

They didn't have Bracero Program in those days.

Espino

At that time?

Davis

Only after the war [World War II] or during the war.

Espino

Okay, that's right. So did your life change during those immigration raids? Did you do anything differently?

Davis

No, not that I really remember. I remember being poor, I guess. I never really realized it. We never were hungry or anything, but we had trouble paying the rent and buying groceries. They [Italian grocery store owner, Tony Lanza] used to give us groceries on the credit list, and the landlady, they always were harassing us because we were late with the rent.

Espino

Were there places that you wouldn't go to?

Davis

I don't remember. We used to rely mainly on a friend of my family, Teodoro Holguin. In fact, he was my godfather at baptism, and he had been the colonel in Pancho Villa's time, and somehow he still kept in touch with my parents, and I think that was one reason that they chose him to baptize me and so on. I only used to see him once or twice a year. I remember when I still was very little, living in the house where I was born, he gave me a doll and a baby carriage for Christmas, and the doll was bigger than I was.

Espino

So at that time there was a lot of tension with the American-born and the foreign-born. In East Los Angeles, or Lincoln Heights, where you grew up, it would have been the Mexican population. Do you remember feeling any racism or discrimination

Espino

I'm just going to pause it for a second.[Recorder turned off.]

Espino

Okay, Grace. Do you remember anything that might have occurred when you were a child that made you feel disliked because you were Mexican?

Davis

We didn't call it discrimination in those days, but we used to get harassed by the Italian, mainly the boys, and the owners of the stores and the houses were all Italian. Lincoln Heights was an Italian community, and even the church, they only had Italian priests. They used to have festivals and processions in May in honor of [Nuestra Señora María] Auxiladora, which was the parish where I belonged, Our Lady Help with Christians. My mother would send me to the little corner store to buy milk, and there were times when the Italian boys would take the milk away from me or chase me down the street and I would drop it or something. So my mother used to have to stand on the sidewalk and watch me as I went down the street to the store and came out again.

Espino

You didn't play with the Italian kids in your neighborhood?

Davis

No, I don't remember. My brother [Jesús] did. In fact, they were the ones who called him Chico. So he used to play with them, but I never did. There were Mexican people in the same courtyard where I was born, and my father, when he was home and not working, used to spend a lot of times with us kids. I remember we used to bring him calendar pictures. They used to give them out at the store all the time, and he took a sewing machine that my mother--I guess she couldn't use it anymore, and he put a saw in it where the needle goes up and down, and he was able to saw plywood or pieces of--I don't know where he got the material, but he would paste the calendar pictures on the wood and then put it through the sewing machine that had the saw, and he would jiggle it all around, and we all had a box, a shoe box, with the puzzle. There was this long sidewalk down the center of the courtyard, and we used to play along that.

Davis

In fact, the day that we had that earthquake [1933 Long Beach Earthquake] back in the 1930s, we were all on the sidewalk with the puzzles on the cement when it started to shake. The kids lived right there along that sidewalk, and so they ran into the house instead of running out. My house was way in the back,

and I couldn't balance myself to go. Then when I got where I could see my house, bricks from the chimney were dropping off the roof, and I was afraid that I would get hit by one, so I passed that earthquake on the sidewalk all by myself.

Espino

That must have been frightening for you.

Davis

It was, yes.

Espino

Did anybody you know get hurt?

Davis

No. What I do remember is that the school which was right across the street from us, Albion Street School, there must have been a lot of damage, because they erected tent like buildings with the bottom house was wood and the top was canvas, and the sides used to roll up to let the fresh air in and so on. But we went to school a whole semester that way, and it rained. I remember the water covering the floor of the schools.

Espino

Did you have any damage to your house other than the chimney?

Davis

I don't remember that we did.

Espino

Your elementary school, you said it was across the street from where you lived.

Davis

Right across the street, yes.

Espino

Then you went to school with mostly Italians?

Davis

Yes. There were other Mexicans, too, but they didn't allow us to speak Spanish.

Espino

Did the Italian kids speak Italian?

Davis

No.

Espino

They spoke English.

Davis

They spoke English, yes.

Espino

Do you remember being treated the same as the Italian kids in school?

Davis

Yes. I don't remember any maltreatment. There was one teacher, Miss Engleheart. I never had her as a teacher. I know my brother did, and she caught us when we were standing in line to go into the classroom. If we were speaking Spanish, she would hit us on the head with the whistle, and that really hurt. But we immediately switched to English.

Espino

Do you remember if your mother ever went in to talk to this teacher about how she treated you?

Davis

Oh, they would never think of that.

Espino

They would never do that.

Davis

No, teachers were highly respected.

Espino

How about for other events, like festivals? Do you remember having anything like that at your elementary school?

Davis

No. There used to be a lot of empty lots around the neighborhood, and there was one lot adjacent to Main Street, and they always used that for the carnival grounds. It was like three days or so in conjunction with the procession that they had of Our Lady [Our Lady Help of Christians]. It was wonderful to be right next-door. Our parents used to let us go and come back. We didn't have fears of something happening to you or anything.

Espino

And that was a festival that the school put out or the church?

Davis

No, the church. Yes.

Espino

So the church was also across the street from where you lived?

Davis

No, that was several--not too many blocks, about three or so.

Espino

And that church had a large Italian community?

Davis

Oh yes, and the priests were all Italians. Nobody spoke Spanish.

Espino

Did they speak Italian, do you remember?

Davis

Oh yes. Yes.

Espino

What about the adults that were Italian, the parents? Do you remember if they spoke Italian to each other?

Davis

Yes, and as I said, they were mainly landlords or owners of the stores, so they had the upper hand on us.

Espino

Do you remember your parents talking about the Italian in a negative way or a positive way?

Davis

No, never. I think they have a lot of respect for them, because they considered them to be above them, to be homeowners and store owners, and they pulled the strings when it came to us having food and shelter.

Espino

Because that's who you went to to pay for your groceries--

Davis

Yes.

Espino

--or to pay your rent.

Davis

I would go with my mother and I remember that Tony Lanza, who owned the grocery store, would shout at my mother because we were late, or when we were going to pay the grocery bill.

Espino

He would shout at her. Do you remember what he would say?

Davis

No.

Espino

But it was a--

Davis

Yes.

Espino

--mean, kind of?

Davis

Yes. We became very good friends later in life when things became equal. Most of the Italian children went away out of the neighborhood, but the original owners of the houses were still around. They were about my mother and father's generation. We still used to buy on credit at the store, but we always obviously could pay. I know my mother helped their wives iron sometimes. She would iron at home. She never worked out of the house while she was here in Los Angeles, but she did take in ironing during the war.

Espino

So during the depression era, during the hard times, she didn't try to find work outside the home?

Davis

No. No, my father always wanted her at home.

Espino

And then it was only after the war that she started to bring in ironing?

Davis

When she lived in Fresno, she worked in the cannery, but she didn't have any children then. After my brother Chico and then I, she had to be home to feed us and clean house and everything.

Espino

What about your brother Chico? Was he working during the depression, or was he too young at that time?

Davis

I think he was too young. My oldest brother, Louis, I don't remember him working. In fact, I remember him having trouble finding work, and he went away to the CC camps [CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps] that the government put up. They used to go away. I remember him going away and hopping a train to get where he was going, and to me it was very far away. But later in life I found out he only went to Bakersfield.

Espino

It seemed far at the time.

Davis

Also, I think it was this week I saw in the paper where the government still runs CCC camps. They have people going there now.

Espino

I'm curious about your elementary school and what they did during the depression era as far as materials like pencils and papers. Do you remember not having--

Davis

We seemed to always have papers. I don't remember too much of anything in the early years, except maybe I remember in kindygarten because my mother worked for the cafeteria, and I used to go and they used to call Penny Lunch, and I would go there to eat, and I would see my mother working there. She was working with the mother of Kenny Washington, who was a very well known football player, and they became very good friends. They used to live in the neighborhood around Avenue 19. The house is still there.

Davis

I don't remember anything about my early years. I remember about the fourth and fifth grade, but the fourth grade teacher, I don't remember her name, but she used to spend the time telling us stories about her son and her family. I don't remember. Once in a while I remember her putting the word noun on the board, and nobody knew what it was. So she said she wasn't going to teach that, and she continued telling us the stories. In the fifth grade I

remember being assigned to write a play about the animals in the desert that we were studying. I don't remember. I remember rehearsing in the auditorium, so I must have written something. But to me the auditorium seemed immense, and in recent years I've been to visit the school when my nieces or grandnieces have graduated from the school, and the auditorium is so small you can almost touch the stage.

Espino

So your mother worked at the school then.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

For a little while.

Davis

A little while.

Espino

And she befriended--

Davis

Kenny Washington's mother.

Espino

Were they Italian?

Davis

No, they were black.

Espino

They were African American?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

So was that common to have African American people--

Davis

No.

Espino

--in your community?

Davis

No, there was a lot of prejudice against the blacks.

Espino

From the Mexican community or from--

Davis

I remember their being concerned about the colors of clothing that we wore. Like if we wore a bright yellow or red, that was supposed to be a no-no, because they said the African Americans were the ones who wore those colors. And except for that one family, I don't remember, even policemen or anything, seeing them.

Espino

Did your parents let you wear those colors if you wanted to?

Davis

Not really.

Espino

Did she ever bring this woman home?

Davis

No. No.

Espino

Did you go to their house?

Davis

No.

Espino

Did they remain friends after she no longer worked there?

Davis

I don't think so, because my mother didn't get out very much at all.

Espino

She didn't get out. What kinds of things would she do when she did get out?

Davis

Go to church. This godfather of mine, Manuel [Teodoro] Holguin, he always used to take the family out on outings. I remember going to Maravilla, which I thought was so far away. It was a beautiful ride. He had one of these old V-8 Fords, so that it didn't have windows, so you got to see the whole thing. We would go to Maravilla, and I don't remember if we were visiting people or having a picnic, but we stayed all day and then came back.

Espino

So your mother would go out when she was with the entire family.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Not on her own.

Davis

Yes, and she went a lot to church. My father, when I remember him, even from when I was little, to the end of his life, practically, he was very active in the church and helped them at the annual bazaar. He dug a pit and lined it with stones, and then they had a sheep that they barbecued. He used to skin it and stuff, and I remember he would put it in burlap sacks, and then put more stones and things on top of it. He would do this the Saturday before, and it would burn all night. He would stay at church as long as he could, and then in

the morning very early they would take the stones off the top and take out the sheep. They would cut it up and had barbecue all day at the church.

Espino

So he volunteered at the church. Did he speak English at that time?

Davis

Well, he had gone to school. He went there at Albion at night. They used to take me with them when they went, and I used to roam the hallways of the kindygarten. Some of my neighbors when I lived on Mozart, Ruth was one woman that I know, and she had two brothers, and they would also go with their parents to the school, and we would sit out in the hall and wait for all our parents who were in school. We would run up and down the hall and go to the bathroom and stuff.

Espino

What a nice service, to offer English to the community at night and allow the children to come. So were you in elementary school at that time?

Davis

Yes. Yes. My father continued working for the church, but he also belonged to the Holy Name Society. He eventually became president. This was way later when I was already going to college. He had been a member. Both he and my mother went to the Nocturnal Adoration of the Host that they had. They used to stay all night, and they would both go and spend the night there in, I guess, keeping watch or something. But a lot of people, neighbors, used to go. My mother had a very nice voice, and she prayed a lot. She was often in church when she would lead the whole group, and she had a prayer book, which my father lost, and I always regretted it, because I wanted to know the prayers that she said. But she led the groups in saying the rosary or reading novenas or so. And when people died, they always came to her to go to the house and pray while they were holding vigil with the body, and she would go to the houses. My father would go, too. I remember the lady at the beauty shop where I used to go sometimes. My Aunt Mary used to take me. But the lady, the owner of the salon, said she wanted my mother to pray for her when she died. She died way after my mother did.

Espino

So your mother was a leader in the church?

Davis

Yes, well, she was just very active, not--any leadership was the praying part. She also, I remember, later in life used to go on the weekends, one day, to meetings of the Third Order, a Franciscan order [The Third Order Society of St. Francis]. She used to go downtown. I don't remember what church, but they would all get together and pray and everything. So she was a member of the Third Order, Franciscan order, and when she died, she was able to wear the habit.

Espino

Wow, that's really nice.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

When she was praying at the church, would she make up her own prayers, or were they prayers from the--

Davis

Oh, no. She had a prayer book.

Espino

From the prayer book, already written.

Davis

Yes, right. But she had a very nice tone.

Espino

Were these prayers in Spanish or--

Davis

Yes.

Espino

--in English?

Davis

Yes, Spanish.

Espino

That's really interesting. So let's talk a little bit about your father's role in the church. Was it also prayer or--

Davis

No, he was a very shy person, very quiet, and he was more the active man, like he built that pit for the barbecue. He manned a booth during the bazaar, or the food booth, too, and cutting up the meat. He finally, as I said, made the president, but that was when I was older already, in college. But we used to tease him because he was so quiet, and we wondered how he would conduct the meeting.

Espino

Was he quiet at home as well?

Davis

Oh yes. He would mainly be reading. He always read *La Opinión*. But if we misbehaved or something and my mother told him that we misbehaved, he would look up from his paper and just give us a look, and that was sufficient to make us behave. I remember running outside from my mother, and him looking out the door and calling us, and we went back in. But he never hit us. He only spoke to us. The only time that I remember that he spanked me was when I was in kindergarten. There was a huge lot behind the house, and for some reason I didn't want to go to school. I had the right eye, it had an ulcer. I only found out in my later years that--the doctor told me, "Oh, you had an ulcer." I guess that's why my father used to take me to the county hospital [Los Angeles County Hospital] every so often, and they would look in my eye in a darkened room. The only thing that I remember is that the county hospital used to give me cod liver oil in a chocolate base. It was a thick, syrupy thing,

and I had to eat that, and I remember my mother had a hard time because I didn't like it. But they said I had to have it.

Davis

But anyway, that time I didn't want to go to school, I was using my eye as a reason for not, and I don't know what I said or he said, but I ran outside on the back lot, and he chased after me until he caught me, and I got a spanking. That's the only time.

Espino

The one time. How about your brothers? Was he the same with them?

Davis

Yes, with them.

Espino

You don't recall him ever--

Davis

No.

Espino

How about discipline? Did your brothers ever get in trouble and need disciplining?

Davis

My brother Chico, when he was around four, he got tuberculosis from one of my father's sister. She died from it, and we had all been exposed to it. So I know the county used to make us go every year or every six months to get a skin test to see if it was positive for tuberculosis. Well, he was the only one, and they took him to Olive View [Tuberculosis Sanitarium], which was a tremendous distance. My father used to go on the bus to go see him as often as he could, and occasionally, very rarely did my mother go. He was spoiled terribly. I guess they had trouble with him there, and they sometimes would make him sleep in the bathtub.

Espino

Your brother, at Olive View?

Davis

Yes. Well, he was little. And he only spoke English. He learned English from them enough, since he was so small. He was there till I think he was around twelve. It was very hard, because he was speaking English, and my parents hadn't gone to school yet or something, and they had trouble disciplining him and telling him, speaking to him. He only spoke to myself and my other brother. And he had trouble at school because he wasn't used to sitting in a classroom. He used to be individually taught by a teacher or somebody at the hospital. So when he came home and had to go to school, he couldn't sit still in the classroom, and he got into a lot of trouble with the teachers.

Davis

Then I don't know. I don't remember what boys, but he had a lot of friends. But I know he got into trouble. I don't remember for what, but I know he was in the Whittier School for Boys at one time.

Espino

Is this your younger brother?

Davis

No, my brother Jesús. My younger brother hadn't been born yet.

Espino

Oh, okay. Jesús is the one who had tuberculosis.

Davis

Right.

Espino

And he was sent to Whittier School for--

Davis

I don't remember how long, because we used to go and visit him. We didn't have transportation. My father could never drive. He had lost one eye. I think when he was little he had a smallpox scab on the eye, and so that interfered

with his sight. Then later when he worked in a foundry, and somehow a piece of metal hit him in the eye. They had to remove the eye, and he had a glass eye. We never saw him without the glass eye. But he used to take it out every night and put it in a glass of water. But we never saw him without it.

Espino

He wasn't able to drive because of his eye.

Davis

Yes. So we depended on the bus transportation, and going to Whittier was a long way off. Going to Olive View was a long way off.

Espino

But your whole family would go see him in Whittier?

Davis

My brother, big brother, didn't go. It would be my mother, my father by himself, and I don't remember ever going. I think when my mother went, they would leave me with a neighbor.

Espino

Was that the one time your brother was in trouble?

Davis

No. Later in life--I don't remember if he had any more trouble before the war. When he went into the service, he was a paratrooper, and the doctor said it was amazing, because he had had tuberculosis, that he was so strong and everything. So he was a paratrooper. He twice was dropped behind the enemy lines, at Normandy and then later--I forget when. He was wounded and had the Purple Heart. He also had, I guess, the Bronze Star, but then he did something and they took it away. When he came back from the war, he was almost addicted to morphine, because of when he had been in the hospital. I guess he looked for something to help him, and I guess he was smoking marijuana with his friends, and also heroine. At the very end he got that way. We had a lot of trouble with him when he was taking drugs. I remember my mother and father had to be very careful where they left things, because he would take them and sell them. Their clothes that they wore to church, they

kept at a neighbor's house. My father used to have to be careful with, in those days, the can of coffee. It was very precious, because after the war, I remember, we used to have to have coupons. I think there was a time when he took the coffee, so my parents were very careful about where they kept the food supplies.

Espino

So we're now in the forties during the war, and your brother served the country, but he came back and he had some difficulties.

Davis

Yes. Yes.

Espino

Did he ever get in trouble with the police?

Davis

Oh yes, he was arrested for possession, and he was in Tehachapi [California Correctional Institution]. I remember just once going to see him, and I think my brother Louis was driving then, and he took us. He was an excellent prisoner. He was a tremendous artist. He could draw beautiful things. While he was in Tehachapi, he learned how to work copper, and he made pictures about that size [gestures] of the--what is it, the Last Supper is Christ with the apostles. He actually hammered the copper with the proper tools, and it was beautiful. He brought that home, and there were several other I don't remember, but he made quite a few. I remember that my mother--I don't know who finally took the pictures, but my mother had those for a long time.

Espino

Do you remember your parents' feelings about your brother and where, how, he became in trouble?

Davis

Well, just very sad about the fact that he was like that.

Espino

Do you think that they might have felt it was when he was institutionalized for tuberculosis, that that's where it started?

Davis

They wouldn't make those kinds of conclusions in those days, but it probably had something to do with his character.

Espino

That was also a time of just widespread police abuse in general.

Davis

Oh yes. My brother Chico told us once that the police had rounded up all the boys from the neighborhood and took them to Elysian Park, which is just down the street on Main Street near Chinatown, and they put them in the corral, and they kept them there for I don't remember how long, but this is something that he never forgot. We were really frightened, too.

Espino

Did he dress like the other kids at the time, the zoot suit?

Davis

Before the war he and the neighbor kids, the Mexicans that were h_____ in those days, all wore zoot suits. But they dressed very nicely. They had their suits made. They didn't buy them off the rack. They had them made at Murray's [downtown Los Angeles tailor] on Third and Main. They used to buy hats there, too, and have their suits. I know that every weekend on Saturday they would get all dressed up and go dancing and what have you. When he went into the paratroopers, I remember when he came home for a visit, he had shirts made at Murray's, handmade shirts, and I remember they had creases in the back, and their boots were real shiny, very, very much, very-- and all the boys in the neighborhood, they used to go out on the weekend. I didn't join a girls' gang in those days, but I used to have to go to store or to the drugstore, and they would hang out in front, but they never bothered me. They would always let me pass, because I was Chico's sister.

Espino

But you didn't wear that same type of clothing or your hair up in a knot?

Davis

No. I used to wear--what did they call them?

Espino

Braids?

Davis

No, they were just little pieces of wool, and we used to put it underneath the-- I forget what. We used to put our hair up, but underneath was this piece of wool, and it covered it up. I forget. What did they call those?

Espino

I don't know. Not a roller, because--something like a roller, but made of wool.

Davis

But it was made of wool that was--you can touch it. It was--

Espino

You could squeeze it?

Davis

Yes, you can squeeze it.

Espino

I thought it was hollow.

Davis

No.

Espino

Those fancy hairdos that looped up, there was actually something inside.

Davis

Yes. Gee, what did they call those?

Espino

I don't know, but we'll try to find out, because that's very interesting. I didn't know that there was actually something in there. But you wore your hair like that.

Davis

Yes, I wore them. Everybody did.

Espino

Even your mom?

Davis

No, not my mom. In fact, they used to tell her, when she got gray hairs, to dye her hair, and she wouldn't do it. But one year my cousin Margaret came down from Visalia and spent a couple of days with us. Well, she got her to dye her hair. She dyed it for her, and we used to tease one another. She used to go to the beauty shop and get permanents. That's how she knew the lady, Emma, who owned the beauty shop.

Davis

My other brother was in the service, too, but he was a medic.

Espino

Would this be--

Davis

He used to help the wounded in the field.

Espino

--Conrado, the older brother?

Davis

Yes, Louis or Conrado, and we used to call him Louis. Somehow he got a hold of a typewriter, an Underwood, and he carried it on his back like he did his backpack, so that he could type the letter home to my mother, and she would believe that he was working behind a desk.

Espino

He didn't want her to know that he was in a dangerous--

Davis

To know that he was out on the field in danger.

Espino

Wow.

Davis

He was a very good medic. I remember the letters I got from him when he was in the Philippines. He also went to Australia, but I know they used to provide services to the village, the people who lived there, and he said he had to deliver babies and stuff. Then I remember him telling me that one time they wanted him to eat, and they were serving monkey, roast monkey, and he couldn't eat that. But that's how familiar he would get with the people.

Espino

So he didn't spend any time in Europe.

Davis

No. He was in the Pacific. My brother Chico was in Europe, and he was in the Pacific.

Espino

Did he come back different, do you remember?

Davis

No, he came back okay. He got married, but I don't remember--I think he got married after, when he came home. In fact, his wife is still living. But he bought a house in City of Commerce. He paid nine thousand dollars for it. He managed to pay it off long before, and my sister-in-law [Mary] had been raped by somebody in New Mexico, which is where she's from, and she had a daughter [Connie] as a result of that. We took care of her for a while, and she was always getting contagious diseases. I knew she had the measles, and I forget what other ones. But I couldn't go to school because they would quarantine me. I remember one time I left the house and went to one of my girlfriends right across the street and thought I could stay there and go to

school, but the public health official came and got me and made me stay at home because I had been exposed to her. But we had so many quarantines, it was getting ridiculous. So her mother [Mary] found--well, I guess she used to live somewhere downtown on Temple Street.

Espino

The mother?

Davis

Her mother, and the woman who had a boardinghouse is where she lived, and that woman said she would take care of her daughter. So Connie went there and stayed with her. My sister-in-law was working in the shipyards, so she needed somebody to take care of her. So when my brother Louis came home, he married her and also took the daughter. He, not too many years later, had a daughter of his own with her, and her name is Sandra [Louis' biological daughter].

Espino

So Connie [Louis' adopted daughter] is your sister-in-law's daughter.

Davis

Right.

Espino

From a rape in New Mexico.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

And your brother married her, and he adopted the little girl as his daughter?

Davis

I don't know that they ever went through an adoption, but he saw her as his daughter.

Espino

Did she call him dad?

Davis

Yes. Yes.

Espino

And they were from your neighborhood? Is that how they met?

Davis

No. Mary lived on Temple Street in that boardinghouse, so I think they met at a dance or something.

Espino

And they knew each other before he went into the military?

Davis

I think so.

Espino

And then when he came back, they married.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Did they live with you in your house?

Davis

No.

Espino

How many bedrooms was your house? Who lived there?

Davis

Two bedrooms. When I went to school, I used to sleep in the living room. The couch used to make into a bed, and you would store the bedding underneath it or something. My brothers had the other bedroom. They had twin beds

there, and my mother and father had the other. So we didn't have a dining room. We just had a kitchen and two bedrooms and the living room.

Espino

Did you say that you shared a bedroom?

Davis

No.

Espino

Oh, you slept on the couch.

Davis

I slept on the couch.

Espino

Where did you keep your clothes, do you remember?

Davis

No, I never thought of that, and I wonder where.

Espino

Do you remember having lots of dresses or just a couple?

Espino

I didn't have too many dresses, no.

Espino

The suits that your brother would have made, would he have more than one, or would he have just one suit that he had made at Murray's?

Davis

They had several.

Espino

They had several. So how would these young kids pay for this suit?

Davis

Oh, they were all working.

Espino

They were all working. But they were all living at home?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

And your brother didn't help with the family household?

Davis

I don't know if he did. I'm sure he gave them money, because when I was a senior in high school--no, in college--my brother Chico gave me the money to buy a dress, a hat, and shoes and stockings and gloves, and I wore them for that Easter, and then the following June I was graduating, so I wore the outfit again under my cap and gown.

Espino

So you were close with your brothers?

Davis

Oh yes. Also, I'm trying to remember--I think it was my big brother [Louis] who also, when I was going to college, gave me a watch with a second hand, because I was studying both chemistry and bacteriology, and I needed a second hand on my watch for timing the experiments, and he gave it to me.

Espino

When you were in middle school, did you have to pay for school supplies? Did they help you with that?

Davis

The school used to provide everything. I don't know how my parents--because I went to the sixth grade, and I don't know what the tuition was or how--I know when it came time to graduation, they gave us a pattern. They told us what pattern to buy so we could make the dresses, and my parents asked Louis' father [Conrado Mendoza] to loan us some money so we could buy

them. I don't know why, but he refused them. Then I don't know. It's really a surprise to me, but I had twenty-five dollars in the Christmas saving bank account. We used to have those when we were little at the Bank of America. I had twenty-five dollars, and we used that money to make the dress or to buy the material for it. This lady who lived down the street did the sewing for me.

Espino

This was from what school that you graduated?

Davis

Sacred Heart [Elementary School].

Espino

That was high school.

Davis

Elementary school, the eighth grade.

Espino

Oh, okay. So you were in Albion up to the sixth grade, and then you went to--

Davis

To Sacred Heart.

Espino

To Sacred Heart.

Davis

Yes, because when we went to the sixth grade, we would transfer to a middle school, and the middle school was way out on Figueroa Boulevard, Nightingale Junior High. My mother didn't want me traveling that far by myself to school, so I don't know what sacrifices they made, but they sent me to a Catholic school, which was a block down my street. There was this family from Chihuahua, where my parents were from, and I think they were landowners in the town. So they always looked to them as an example of what they were doing, and that year they were also sending their two daughters to Catholic school. So I got sent, too. I don't know how my parents did it. But when I went

to high school, which was right across the street from the elementary school, Sacred Heart Academy, I was able to work in the library, and I worked for my tuition that way, which was only ten dollars in those days.

Espino

So you worked in the library and paid your full tuition?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Your parents didn't have to pay.

Davis

No, they probably paid some. But they were always--my father, particularly, was very much concerned that I really stick to my education and so on, and especially when I was in college, during the winter sometimes it would be raining or stuff, and he would go and wait way up on Broadway where the streetcar used to let me off, and he would have an umbrella and walk me home. I know they bought me a coat so I could wear it during the winter, and it was beige. We bought it from this lady that we knew at church. She used to sing in the choir. She worked in the sewing industry, and that's why she was able to get a coat. I remember it was something like fourteen dollars or something. Well, they had the coat dyed black so it wouldn't show the dirt. But it was a nice coat.

Espino

You liked that coat.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

That's when you were going to UCLA? No, to Immaculate Heart.

Davis

No, to Immaculate Heart College.

Espino

On that trip you would take the train?

Davis

No, I would take the streetcar up to Temple and Broadway, and then walk up Temple to Hill Street and catch the Red Car. That used to take me all the way up Sunset Boulevard to Hollywood Boulevard.

Espino

Do you remember how long that trip would be?

Davis

It wasn't very long. We just went as far as Western, Western and Hollywood Boulevard. We had quite a walk uphill to get to the Immaculate Heart, because Immaculate Heart was way up on the hill. Even after we got on the campus, we had to walk up.

Espino

So initially you went to Sacred Heart because your parents didn't want you to walk too far. You were young. And Sacred Heart, was that walking distance from your house?

Espino

Eight blocks.

Espino

It was eight blocks.

Davis

Yes. It was straight down Mozart.

Espino

And then did you change churches? Did you start attending Sacred Heart Church?

Davis

No. Sometimes we would go to Sacred Heart if the school was having something, but no, I went to Our Lady Help of Christians.

Espino

Do you have any fond memories of middle school or high school at Sacred Heart, anything that you enjoyed?

Davis

Well, I remember that most of the girls were better off than I was. We wore a uniform, so you couldn't tell about the clothes or anything. But they used to talk about going to dances and other things, which I didn't. I went to dances at Our Lady Help of Christians. They used to have a young people's club, and they would have dances for us every once in a while, and I would go there with my friends. But at Sacred Heart Academy I remember on first Friday we used to go early and go to mass before we went to school. My mother used to pack me a breakfast lunch to take in addition to my lunch, and so I used to eat on campus after church. But I remember I would have tacos to eat, and the other girls didn't. They had bread.

Davis

As a freshman I remember really liking general science and Sister Mary Michaels, my teacher, and really enjoying the science. I remember looking under the microscope at a geranium petal and saw beautiful cells and colored, and I think that's what turned me on to science. I remember the Latin teacher. She was a German teacher. But during the war she used to "Hail Hitler."

Espino

In class?

Davis

In class.

Espino

What did you do?

Davis

She taught Latin and had a real thick accent. But I remember one time one of the students, Jane La Trel, was--we used to have to go upstairs to the second floor, and her room was right at the top of the steps. I remember she was saying, "Charge," and ran up the steps and bumped into this nun. She was a roly-poly nun, too.

Espino

She was a nun who was German, teaching Latin, and she was also a Nazi sympathizer.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

That's interesting that nobody complained about her. None of the kids told their parents about her?

Davis

No.

Espino

Did she make you do that symbol as well?

Davis

No. No. And I don't remember why she would be hailing Hitler. I mean, Latin, we took that. Let's see. I remember, when we were going to graduate as seniors, that the class was electing people to different positions that we would put--we didn't have a yearbook. We had a newspaper about so big [gestures], and they took all our pictures, and there's a whole page with our pictures. I was chosen the most likely to succeed.

Espino

Out of all the kids.

Davis

Of all the kids, yes.

Espino

Were there many Mexican kids at that time?

Davis

There were a few.

Espino

And mostly Italian?

Davis

No, they were Anglos. They were coming from all over the city.

Espino

I'm curious, how would you differentiate between Italians and Anglos? Was there something that stood out that made them seem different?

Davis

Well, I only related to them when I was going to Sacred Heart Academy. When my niece [Connie] was there, I remember sometime the landlady's grandchildren, who was another girl, was playing. My niece used to go over to them, which was right next-door, and play. And I don't know, they did something or I don't know why, but she came home crying. I remember going and knocking on the door, and feeling--I mean, I really was feeling equal to her, I think because of my education. I told her what had happened, and that if something like that ever happened again, that I would go to the authorities. I don't think my niece ever went there again, and she was probably taken to the other place to be taken care of by that lady. But I remember not feeling inferior to the Italians anymore.

Espino

After you had been at the Sacred Heart Academy.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

What about to the Anglo kids? Did you feel differently?

Davis

No. They were just as friendly, and it was a nice place to go.

Espino

You had relationships. Did you socialize with the other girls from the other ethnic groups?

Davis

Not the ones that were in class, because they lived far away. Some of them were going there from St. Ignatius or Conaty, which was downtown. They were coming from a long way. The girl that lived across the street from me, Frances, I used to socialize with her. She was a year below me.

Espino

And she was Mexican?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Would you go out to the movies or--

Davis

Yes, to the movies. The movies were on Broadway and Daly, and I know that we used to go to the matinee so we wouldn't be walking in the dark. We also went to church and to the youth club.

Espino

So your parents let you go off by yourself with your girlfriend.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Did you date at that time?

Davis

No.

Espino

When you were going to the dances, was it okay for you to dance with boys when you were in high school?

Davis

Yes. I remember dancing with Humberto, and we were very good jitterbugs.

Espino

You did the jitterbug. Was Humberto your neighbor from the neighborhood?

Davis

No, he was just in the club. He didn't live near--well, he lived on Workman near Broadway, and he used to come to our church.

Espino

I think we're going to leave it here, Grace, at the end of high school, and next time we'll pick up during your university years at Sacred Heart [Immaculate Heart College]. Thank you.[End of interview]

1.3. Session 3 (September 11, 2008)

Espino

This is Virginia Espino, and today is September 11, 2008, and I'm interviewing Grace Montañez Davis at her home in Highland Park, Los Angeles, California.

Espino

Okay, Grace, today we're going to go back to some of the themes that we talked about last time, your early childhood, just to follow up on some questions that I have and some things that you remembered since our last interview. You want to go ahead and start with some of your recollections that you had?

Davis

Yes. I thought back to the house where I was born in The Courtyard on Avenue 18, and I remember the house. It didn't have any electricity. We had lanterns, and no bath, just a toilet, and we had to go out into the back porch to get to the toilet. We took a bath every week in one of those big washtubs. In the backyard I remember my mother [Belen Mendoza Montañez] used to use the same tub that we used to bathe in, she used to use it to boil the white clothes. It was a yard sufficiently large, so she would build the fire and the tub was there. I don't know how she managed to boil them and rinse them and get them hung up.

Davis

Also I remember when I was little, my mother used to push the table aside in the kitchen, and she would teach me the Mexican dances. El Caballito Blanco, I remember, and El Jarabe. Also she taught me to orate and so on. I think she learned that at school, and although my father said he didn't go to school, she remembers him there. But I guess they used to teach the children to be orators and so on, so she used to have me orate and read from La Opinión.

Davis

I remember a Mr. Naranja or something. And while we still lived there, my brother came back from the sanitarium, where he lived a short time. Also, I mentioned that there were families. Right at the head of the sidewalk that came down the center, there were two duplexes, and on the right side this Mendoza family lived there, and I used to play with the girls. But they had an older sister, Angelita, and she used to take all the girls in the neighborhood in the month of May to church in the evening to offer flowers to Our Lady [Our Lady Help of Christians]. She was just wonderful. I remember the whole group of us going to church, and our mothers had got a very simple dress and veil for us that we used to use during the month of May.

Davis

That family, there were like about three brothers and three sisters, and the brothers have died. Celia was the second oldest, and she went to Sacred Heart and so on, and later in life I saw her at Sacred Heart Church. She and her husband used to help with communion. Her husband has since died, but she's still living, and I talk to her every once in a while. Angelita, the one that used

to take us to church, was also the one who had this organization at church for young girls, and I remember we wore a white skirt, a white blouse, and a blue blazer with an emblem of the initials of the organization. I don't remember what it was called. But the last time I checked, she was still living. She must be terribly old, and I think she had either dementia or Alzheimer. She lived at home. She lived in the back house and Celia lived in the front house. They live on Sichel Street right down the street from Sacred Heart Church. Her other sister, I can't think of her name, but she's also called me, so I keep in touch with that family.

Davis

Then at the head of the court, there was a lady named Margarita, and she had children, but they already were gone and married. But she used to gather all of us children on her front porch in the evening and tell us stories, teach us how to embroider, and we really looked to her for some good times and all that. I don't know if she was in charge of the homes there and the manager or not. But we always knew [unclear]. I don't know when she died or anything, but I remember her.

Davis

That same Mendoza family, for Christmas they were the only family that I remember that had a Christmas tree, and that was such an amazing thing. They would invite us over on Christmas Eve and they'd make tamales. Then they would go to midnight mass, but us kids supposedly were supposed to be asleep, and many of us would sleep in one bed and all. We were just waiting for them to come back to see what was under the tree. I don't remember that we got very much or any of the things we got.

Davis

I do remember one time for Christmas--my mother was a very good Catholic, but this time on Main Street there was a storefront church. I don't know. It was just a Christian church, and she heard they were giving toys and things to the family. So I remember she went and was kneeling with the people when they were praying. I was just looking, but I got a little cloth duck, just a little one, and I thought it was wonderful, and it was a good Christmas for me.

Espino

And this was the time when you lived in what you call The Courtyard?

Davis

The Courtyard, yes, court house, yes.

Espino

Can you describe a little bit of what The Courtyard looked like? Was it a square?

Davis

It was like a horseshoe. There were houses on two sides, and at the head was this duplex, and then on each corner were houses, and I lived in the one on the left, and I don't remember--somebody lived on the other side. They all had very small yards. We had a yard, but I also had the advantage of an empty lot, the whole block behind the house, which now--I've been by there, and it's all kinds of factories and things.

Davis

I went to school there, I remember, I guess almost to the end of elementary school. When we moved down the street on Avenue 18 on the other side of the school, we lived in a duplex, and the one thing I remember during that time, that my father [Alfredo Viallescua Montañez] built not a refrigerator, but an icebox. It had a lid on the top, and we would put ice in the top, and below there were two little shelves, and we kept our milk and everything else in it, and that's why we used to buy ice from the iceman.

Davis

But I remember destroying the icebox at one point. I don't know why. But I remember the--you know how wood is shaved into--looks like straw? Well, my father had used that for insulation, and I just wondered how he knew about insulation. But he had built that, and I remember having that.

Davis

Also I remember it was during the depression, and that my father and I would go walking from Lincoln Heights all the way down North Broadway and down Spring Street, and we used to go through what was Old Chinatown. I remember going ahead of my father when we were walking, but when we got

to Chinatown, I always went back and took his hand, because there would be Chinese men sitting in the front of their house with the long beard and the cap and smoking pipes, and they were just unfamiliar to me, so I was just afraid of them. But we used to get through and go to the theater. I remember seeing Western movies with Gene Autry, and there was somebody else named Bob something [Bob Steele]. But there were serials and things, and I think the show was only ten cents or something. But this was something that my father and I did together. My brother wasn't home yet at that time.

Davis

Also in that same Chinatown I remember there were a lot of court houses there, and at one time I remember my mother and father had had this friend who was a colored [African descent] woman and Hispanic. So I don't know now. I think she must have come from South or Central America, because she spoke Spanish. Every once in a while my mother and father would take me--

Espino

Okay, we're going to pause it just a second because the phone's ringing.[Recorder turned off.]

Espino

Okay, Grace. You were telling me about Chinatown.

Davis

Yes. We had a friend, a woman of color, and my mother and father sometimes would take me and we would go visit her. I remember vaguely her face and sitting down and being quiet and so on. But I think that was the one encounter I had with anybody of color when I was little.

Espino

Was this in Chinatown? She lived in Chinatown?

Davis

Yes, in the court. I guess that was probably lonely [unclear].

Espino

Okay, so when you say lots of courts, you mean like courtyards?

Davis

Yes. We still have them there. A lot of apartments or houses together, and you walk down the sidewalk and go into each one. They were not like the horseshoe where I lived. They were just long, and there were about four houses to a section there.

Espino

And they would be small houses--

Davis

Yes.

Espino

--or big houses?

Davis

Yes, small.

Espino

So this woman lived among the Chinese community.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

And the Chinese, would you say most of the members or all of the members, would wear traditional clothing and--

Davis

I just remember seeing the men who sat out in front. I don't remember seeing anybody else.

Espino

So it wasn't common for you to go to Chinatown and buy Chinese food or--

Davis

No, not at all. We just went through there when we were going to the movies.

Espino

And you wouldn't see Chinese people in your neighborhood?

Davis

No. No, they wouldn't come as far as that. They were just mainly Italians and the Mexicans from Mexico were starting to infiltrate the neighborhood.

Davis

What I remember about the duplex, too, is that we had to share the bath with the other family. Somehow we managed to do that, and we were always on the lookout if they were in there or something. We had to knock before we opened the door.

Davis

Then the other thing I remember, on the right-hand side next to the school, an Italian family lived there. I don't remember the name, but they had several children, and the boy's name was Anthony, and I used to play with him. Well, by the time we were on Mozart Street, my brother [Jesús] was part of the family then, and I remember he used to get Anthony and I to box each other. He'd make us a ring somehow in the front yard, and then we would box. For some reason, I always managed to overcome him, and he would go home, and his mother would scold him because he let a girl beat him up and so on. But the family was very good to us. I would go and play in their yard, and certain days of the week the lady used to make homemade bread, Italian bread, big, round loaves, and if I was playing there she would invite us all in and give us each a slice of bread with olive oil and pepper on it, and it was the most delicious thing, because she didn't do it all the time, but she did it.

Espino

That was when you lived on the duplex.

Davis

Oh, the other thing, they had in the basement a cage, a small cage about so big [gestures], and they grew snails. They used to eat snails, but they were very clean snails, because they fed them and they had sawdust on the bottom and stuff.

Espino

This same Italian family that made the bread grew snails?

Davis

Yes, right. So I don't know what he made out of it. I don't remember anything other than the bread and the iceman. We always tried to make ice cream. We had milk and sugar and the ice, but of course, it wasn't cold enough to freeze the milk. But we enjoyed the ice anyway.

Davis

Then from the duplex we moved around the corner on Mozart Street. The landlady's for that house was facing Avenue 18, and her backyard and our front yard were next to each other. So this was where my mother and she used to talk. My mother would speak Spanish, and somehow she would use Italian words that were very much like Spanish, and they managed to talk. But at Mozart, the things I remember about that, was that my brother Rudy [Rodólfo] was born there. I don't remember his--only once when he had a fever, the next-door lady down Mozart came over to help my mother with him, and I do remember one thing. She put a raw egg in a cup of water and set it at his head, and the egg cooked. I do remember that. The woman who came over, she had some grown sons, and one son who didn't work, his name was Jesús, and he used to peek out the front door once in a while so we used to stay away from him, because we were afraid, I don't know, that something was wrong with him.

Davis

The other thing, the war [World War II] started when we were there in that house. But before the war my brother Louis had been living with his father [Condrado Mendoza] and stepmother [Mary Mendoza] during the four years that he went to high school at Lincoln High School. For some reason, his father said that it would be better if he lived with him during that time. He would take care of the expenses and things. Well, on graduation night my mother's compadre [Teodoro Holguin], my godfather, took my mother and father to Lincoln High School, because it was far in those days, and he took them and they went to his graduation. I was staying with the neighbor. I remember they picked me up at the neighbor's and then we walked home, and there on the

porch was my brother Louis with his blankets and a couple of bags with his possessions and things. He said, "My father said I had to live with him while I was going to school. Well, I've graduated, so I've come home to Mother." That was real thrilling, to see that.

Davis

I remember we got our first TV, so we were really moving up. We had electricity and a bath, but we got our first black-and-white TV.

Espino

When you lived on Mozart.

Davis

When we lived on Mozart. My brother were both in the service, and just my brother Rudy and I lived there, but we enjoyed the television.

Espino

Do you remember when the war broke out? Do you remember where you were?

Davis

It was in 1945, and I was in high school, because I remember there was an assembly, and we heard President Roosevelt on the air. They had a radio there for us all to hear that we were at war. Basically, almost my four years [in high school] were during the war.

Espino

Did your brothers join right away?

Davis

They were drafted.

Espino

They were drafted. They didn't enlist.

Davis

No.

Espino

And do you remember, were they excited to go? Were they afraid?

Davis

I think my brother Chico, because his friends were also going, they just made the most of it. My oldest brother was a medic, and somehow he managed to take a typewriter, an Underwood, and he carried it with his backpack so that he could type his letters back to my mother so she would think he was behind a desk or something. My brother Chico, he came home once, I remember, looking real sharp. When he came home at the end, my mother was at church, and they had the Adoration of the Sacraments, and she and my father used to go and pray all night. So my brother Chico came home all of a sudden. I didn't expect him or anything, and I remember that I told him my mother was at church. He went to church, and I didn't see this but my mother told me, and the rest of the people that were there, that it was really quite a thrill to see him go--she was kneeling in front of the altar, and he went and knelt next to her. So that was quite a surprise for her.

Espino

She was not expecting him.

Davis

No. But one thing I remember her doing, she went and she did this before we were up or anything. We only heard about it later, but she went on her knees from our house to the church.

Espino

Before or after they--

Davis

Before they came home. That was in tribute to them so that they would be safe and come home. We only found out because she was taking care of her knees. They were rough, real scarred, and then she told us that she had gone to church. That was really something.

Espino

Yes. Do you think other people did that as well? Was that common?

Davis

No. There may be one or other people, because there were very religious when I was little. Our whole life centered around church. We went to carnivals, processions, dances, the Jamaica that they had, too.

Espino

That's a big sacrifice, to crawl on your knees like that.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Do you have some other recollections?

Davis

When I was there, I remember going to night school with my parents. They were learning English, and they used to take me. One of the neighbors was also going, and she took her daughter. She just lived three houses from us. We used to run around the hallway.

Davis

Oh, the other thing, during the war my father converted our front yard that we used to have grass, he converted it to a victory garden, and we were growing our own vegetables and so on.

Espino

Your parents read La Opinión. Is that what they read?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Did they read that on a regular basis?

Davis

Yes, and I don't remember when, but I remember, I guess it was in Darwin Street, but then we subscribed to the L.A. Times [Los Angeles Times] every day, so my father used to read the Times and La Opinión.

Espino

I ask because I'm interested how your parents felt about the war. They grew the victory garden. That shows that they were in support of the United States seeing a victory. Did they talk about their views, their political views, how they felt?

Davis

No. They were just worried about the boys. I don't remember--

Espino

If they had an opinion about Germany or--

Davis

No, not at all. Let's see. I do remember that I think somehow that we were supposed to entertain soldiers, and I invited them to send soldiers to the house, and I remember one young man came on a Sunday and he went to church with me. But I don't remember doing anything much more than that. But that was the reason why, because they asked us somehow to entertain soldiers in the home, and we responded, so that's how.

Davis

The other real dramatic thing that happened to me there was, my father worked about a block away on Avenue 17. There was a factory that dyed tablecloths, and he worked there dying them and all that. Well, one time--he wore rubber boots way up to his knees, but he was carrying a bundle of wet tablecloths. They came in a roll, and he was carrying that within the factory, and he fell down, and the roll landed on his leg, and they told him that he had to go to the hospital. Well, for some reason he walked on that leg, because I guess he had the boot, and he came home. I don't remember if I was in school then.

Espino

Okay, I'm going to just pause it for a second, because someone's coming in.

Espino

Okay, Grace, you were telling me about your father's injury at work.

Davis

Right. Somehow he managed to come home, and it must have been the summer, because I was there, and he told me that he had broken his leg. Well, it happened that at the same time my mother was in the county hospital [Los Angeles County Hospital]. She had a tumor, a bleeding fibroid. I remember they were treating her with X-rays in those days, and she was there quite some time. My father used to go see her, and of course, he couldn't, so this left my brother Rudy and myself all by ourselves. He was around seven years old, and the reason I know that is because he was also studying to make his first communion. Somehow I managed to buy an outfit for him and to ask the neighbor to be his sponsor, and I remember we managed to have this, and I used to go visit my mother at the county hospital and then hightail it over to the California Hospital--that's where my father was to see him--and then come home. It was frightening to sleep at night with just my brother and I.

Espino

Is this when you were in high school?

Davis

I think I was in high school then, because I lived on Mozart.

Espino

This must have been also during the war as well. Your brothers were away.

Davis

Yes, my brothers were away, and it was just my little brother and I. My father was anxious about trying to get home. I remember the first day I saw him, they had put a cast on him right away and didn't wait for the swelling to go down, and he was in agony. They had to cut it off and wait a period before they gave him another cast. It was some time before he--it was just days, actually, because he insisted on coming home.

Espino

Okay, it wasn't months that he was--

Davis

No, just days. My mother was the one who stayed in the hospital a long time. Then, as I said, she had a bleeding fibroid or something. I don't ever remember calling it cancer, just a tumor.

Espino

Was she in pain as well?

Davis

I don't know. She never told us.

Espino

She never complained.

Davis

No, and I don't know how she ended up at the county hospital. I guess in those days--when I was born, they used to come to the house and deliver the baby. That's how I was born. That's how the doctor named me Grace, because it was on Thanksgiving Day.

Espino

There's one thing I wanted to ask you about that same period, and that is if you were aware or your parents were aware of the internment of the Japanese community. Did that affect your family or your neighborhood at all?

Davis

Not too much, because the Japanese didn't live there or anything. My father at that time was working with a gardener. They used to get up very early in the morning, and the gardener would pick him up and they worked all together, and he would be gone all day. I don't know if he was Japanese or what, but I don't remember too much about that. We were aware, I think, because it was in the newspaper. I don't remember having a television. The television came more toward the end of the war. But it shows how stable my family was getting to be, if they could afford a television and so on.

Espino

Right. Each time you moved, in the second move you gained indoor plumbing. Even though you had to share with someone else, you still had indoor plumbing. You weren't bathing in the washtub. Then in your third move you gained electricity along with indoor plumbing. Did you have your own bathroom in the third move?

Davis

Yes. Yes. The little back porch was real small, and it had one of those deep basins, because my mother used to use it to wash. We had a washing machine by then.

Espino

But the washing machines during that time were probably much different than what we know.

Davis

Oh yes. They had the rollers up on top, and they used to take the cloth and put them through the roller, and they would come out. The water was pressed out, and they would hang them. They were lines out there, out the back door.

Espino

To dry.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Was there anything else that you wanted to tell me about?

Davis

Well, I think I've told you about having a sixteen-year party. My mother, we invited some girls. It was just dinner and cake, but it was nice. I do remember-- I went there to college, too, but I don't think you want to go into that yet.

Espino

That's right, but actually, your memories kind of brought up some of the other things that I wanted to talk about, like the war that happened during your high school years and the Japanese internment. I wanted to talk about that as well.

Davis

One other thing that I remembered, that it was during the depression, was my brothers and I were sitting around the table. My mother was supposed to get lunch on the table, and she disappeared, and we were just sitting there waiting. Finally my brother got up to go see, and a tramp, I used to call them, came to the door and asked for some food, and my mother was feeding him before she fed us, and whatever lunch she was going to give us, she was giving to him. My brother came back in, and he said, "I guess we're going to have to go to the railroad yards or something to get food around here." It always happened around the first of the month, and she always said that it was the Sacred Heart, because he was honored at the beginning of the month. Even at Mozart, they still came to the door. We figured that by word of mouth the tramps used to tell each other about good homes to go to to get food and things, because you always had a circle of guys coming.

Espino

They were the same people that would come back?

Davis

No, they would be others; sometimes the same, but there would also be others that had been told, and my mother never turned them away.

Espino

But your brother didn't like the fact that--

Davis

No, he didn't mind it, because after all, he went away to the CC [CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps] camp from there before. That was early.

Espino

Can you tell me what the CC stands for?

Davis

I don't remember what it stands for, but it's some camp. California, some camp, and it's still in existence, because I read in the paper some day that some boys from some neighborhood were going to the CCC camp.

Espino

I'll look up that and see what it stands for. Do you think that they were still coming during the war years as well to ask for food?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

And they were primarily men?

Davis

Yes, men.

Espino

Men only.

Davis

Men only, yes. During the time that we lived on Mozart Street, I remember two things about the community. One, that they made wine. All the Italian families once a year made wine, and they would rent a winepress, a great big winepress, and it would go from house to house. They used to pitch in and everybody paid for it, so it went from house to house. I don't remember where they got the grapes, but they used to buy grapes, and the men of the house used to make it. I remember making it on Mozart Street, because the landlady used to make wine, and my father and another man, who lived on Main Street, used to make it for her. They handled the winepress and everything. As a reward, she would open up a bottle of last year's wine. I don't know if she paid them or not, but she gave them wine, and they had a jolly old time. My mother used to object to their having a good time, because she had a big fig tree in the back and a picnic table, so they would sit there, and you could hear this chattering and what have you.

Davis

The other thing is that the Italians had a Saint Joseph altar, and I remember, even during the war, because we used to share our sugar coupons with them so that they could bake. They would put this long table with regular bread but in different shapes like crosses or round ones, and cookies and other kind of sweet things. I remember little cones made with little puff cookies like that were all held together with honey and shaped like a cone, and they had those all over the table, and other cookies that had frosting on it that got hard after they put it on. They would give us those and give us a plate of spaghetti when they had the altar.

Davis

Down the street from us there was a man who we used to call "Big Steve." He owned a bar on Broadway, and every year he would have a barbecue in his backyard. He had a big backyard. He would have gambling in his cellar. We would just hear about it. The men used to go down there. I remember eating pizza, which was very different from what we have now. It was a bread that used to rise about that high [gestures], and they just had tomato sauce on the top and cheese. That's all. They didn't have all the other things, and they made it in a square instead of round. We all used to go. I don't remember having barbecue, but just the pizza.

Davis

Then when the boys came home from the war, he used to buy them all a drink at his place, so they all used to stop by to say hello to Big Steve, that they were home now, and he would give them a drink.

Espino

And Big Steve was Italian.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Did Italian boys also go to war?

Davis

Oh yes.

Espino

In your neighborhood?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Do you remember if there were other victory gardens in your neighborhood, of your neighbors?

Davis

No, not really.

Espino

Do you want to move on to your experience at Immaculate Heart [College]? That was when you graduated from high school and decided to go to college.

Davis

Well, yes, I still lived on Mozart, and I really was intending to go to UCLA. I applied at UCLA and I took the entrance exam and I passed it. But then I decided I couldn't go that September because I needed to have money, and so there was a factory, a soap factory in the neighborhood. They're right off of Mozart on Avenue 19, and I applied there, and they gave me a job. They had like a big funnel, and the soap used to drop from the funnel, but it was weighed and everything so you got the right amount in the boxes. There was a band on the side where you filled it and put it there, and somebody on the other end was taking them off and putting glue on the top and closing them. So I worked there so that I would have money.

Davis

But then my girlfriend, Evelyn March, and I, she didn't go to college, either. She was working, and we decided to go visit Immaculate Heart College to go see the girls who had been in our high school with us but had gone on to Immaculate Heart. There were about two or three, and we went to visit them. Evelyn March was driving. She had an old Plymouth, and so we drove together and went to see them. We visited all around the school and saw the girls and

all that. I don't remember how we got to meet the dean of women. I forget her--Sister Anita. She met us and she wanted to know if we were coming to school there. We said no, we were going to UCLA, and she said, "You can't go to that heathen school," and she offered us scholarships, or at least to work, that we would be able to work and help pay our tuition. So instead of going to UCLA we started Immaculate Heart.

Davis

At first I remember riding the Red Car Line. I used to walk up to Broadway and take the yellow transit there, and that would take me up to Temple Street, and then I walked over to Hill Street. There was a big tunnel there, and the Red Cars used to come from the station, which was like on Fourth Street or something, and it would come by there, and I would catch it there and go all the way to Western and Hollywood Boulevard. That's where it took me, and it kept on going. Then I would have to walk up the hill to where the campus was.

Espino

And Evelyn, was she from your neighborhood?

Davis

She lived on Altura Street, which was more near Sacred Heart.

Espino

And you met her at Sacred Heart--

Davis

Yes.

Espino

--High School?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Was she Mexican?

Davis

No. Evelyn March. Her mother was a nurse. She didn't have a father. I don't know where he was. And I know she suffered from migraine headaches, very severe headaches. Evelyn used to tell me that her mother used to darken the rooms where she was because she couldn't stand the light. Then eventually she got this car, so we were driving together to Immaculate Heart. She was studying chemistry, too, like I was.

Espino

Would you have considered her your best friend from high school?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Is she the one who helped you to decide to go to college, or did you have a college counselor at your high school?

Davis

No. From the very beginning as freshmen, they divide the class into academic and clerical, and so from the very beginning I was--what is it?--guided to college. Sister Michaels was our freshman teacher, and she taught us general science, and it was there that I decided that I wanted to be some kind of a scientist, because I was amazed at what I looked at under the microscope. Flower petals, you could see cells and things. I made bread molds in the basement to take to school to look at under the microscope. And that's when I decided that I was going to go to college.

Davis

I also took typing, though, because they said that was necessary. And my senior year, the superintendent of schools, of Catholic schools, came to visit us in the senior year, and he offered me a sociology scholarship to go to Immaculate Heart, and I turned him down because I wanted to be a scientist.

Espino

Is that why you chose--was it UCLA, because of its science program, instead of Immaculate? Before you went to Immaculate, you--

Davis

For some reason, I thought Immaculate Heart was more expensive than UCLA that I could go there. UCLA, I don't remember hearing SC then, but I guess it was there, too. But that was a place to go. When I first went to UCLA, I used to drive to UCLA. And I could never figure out how come my mother approved of this, but there were five fellows who had returned from the war, and they were on the GI Bill and got their education that way. But they used to come and honk, and I would go, go to school and come back, and on Saturdays they used to go to the football games, and they used to come and pick me up, and I would go. And my mother approved of all this. I was very surprised.

Espino

You were much older at that time then.

Davis

Oh yes. Yes, I was eighteen and more.

Espino

So at Immaculate Heart did you find science inspirational like you did in high school?

Davis

Oh yes. In chemistry the head of the department was a nun who had just graduated from Stanford, and she was teaching chemistry. Then the teacher--I don't know why, but I also leaned toward bacteriology, and the nun who taught that was Sister Agatha. She was an older nun, but she was still very interesting, and I enjoyed the classes with her. So I know that when I graduated, I told them--and I had graduated in two majors--and they went to the catalogue and counted all the courses I had taken, and I had taken all the requirements for both. But I got a B.A. instead of B.S. I wanted a B.S., but they gave B.A.'s.

Espino

You were majored in chemistry?

Davis

Chemistry and bacteriology, yes.

Espino

And you wanted to go to graduate school immediately after Immaculate Heart?

Davis

It never occurred to me that I was going to go to graduate school. I only thought of that, I guess, in my senior year, that I wanted to do something else with what I had learned. I got the information and applied to Max Dunn, who was the head of the biochemistry department at UCLA. I remember he invited me to come for an interview. It was on a Saturday, and I went to see him. Evidently he was impressed with my credentials, because he accepted me into his department. But he told me that he had never had a Mexican in his department, and that if I had any trouble with that, that I would have to take care of it by myself, that he did not want to get involved.

Espino

You mean if you had any trouble because you were Mexican?

Davis

Right. Well, what I found out when I got there was that there were twenty-five Jews and me. The woman before me was an Anglo, and she left when I got there, and I took over the animals. We used to work with rats and that was all cancer research. We were dealing with the inhibition of tumors by the amino acids. I remember having an Indian who was working for his Ph.D. He had a master's degree from India, and he landed up in UCLA. It was a very good experience with him. He was a nice guy. So were the rest of the guys.

Espino

So in a way it was diverse, because there were yourself and a person from India and then Jewish people. Were there other women or were you the only woman?

Davis

No. There was one other woman, Ruth. The man who was in charge of the animal compound was also Anglo. I don't remember what degree he had. He didn't have a doctor's degree. Eddie, his name was. I don't remember what year it was, but during the time that I was going to UCLA, I got married. I remember that Dr. Dunn, we used to publish papers, and he would always make sure that my name--at the beginning it said "Grace M. Davis." At the footnote it said, "Formerly Grace Montañez," and now Grace Davis. In every one of the publications he put some footnote to make sure that they knew I was Mexican.

Espino

Why do you think he did that?

Davis

I don't know. Because after the way he had said that he didn't want to get involved--but it was his own idea. But this was a very nice experience. I was there years. It took me years to get my master's, because I enjoyed it so much.

Davis

From there I used to go on the Wilshire bus. I remember where I used to transfer, but it took me about an hour to get there every day, and I used to stay late at night and come home and just turn around and go back. So I looked into student housing and found a family on Glendon Avenue just off of Westwood Boulevard and Olympic, and I was going to rent a bedroom from her. It was a family with two young daughters.

Davis

Before I moved in there, I lived in this other one. This woman was a teacher, and she had one daughter. I moved in, and I remember the first night of being so homesick that I just sat on the floor near the bed with boxes of stuff all around me and not having the energy to do a thing. I was just so homesick and all that. The teacher was away at summer camp, so I was there all summer by myself, and my girlfriends from Immaculate Heart who were now going to UCLA and SC, they used to come to the house and we would do things. They taught me to smoke, to inhale, because when I was at Immaculate Heart, outside along the auditorium, we used to call it Nicotine Alley, and all the girls

who smoked had to go to Nicotine Alley to do that. And I used to go to Nicotine Alley just to be with my friends. I didn't smoke. But when I got to be a graduate student, they decided it was time. I never smoked that much, though. After I got married, I quit.

Espino

So at Immaculate Heart, was that considered taboo, to smoke? A female smoking, was that--

Davis

No. No, that was just--you didn't do it in public.

Espino

You didn't do it in public.

Davis

Just at the Nicotine Alley.

Espino

What about like at nightclubs or--

Davis

Oh, that was okay. What you did off-campus was your business.

Espino

Oh, okay, I see. And did the nuns know about Nicotine Alley--

Davis

Oh yes.

Espino

--or was it a secret place?

Davis

No, hey, everybody knew about it, yes. The nuns were quite a contrast to the nuns in my high school. The nuns in grammar school and in high school weren't public at all. I mean, the convent was there in the same building with

the high school, and they would get away, go into the convent and drink water. We used to have school picnics, and we would go on the picnic, and the nuns used to find a secluded spot to eat their lunch, not with us at all. But then when I got to Immaculate Heart, it was completely different. The nuns were very friendly with us. We used to have teas, and they would be there, drinking tea and having cookies with us. I think they drove. It was quite different.

Espino

How about smoking? Would you see a nun in Nicotine Alley?

Davis

Oh, no. No.

Espino

What about the use of alcohol? Was that more common once you arrived at Immaculate Heart?

Davis

No, we didn't. The only drinking I saw was at the prom. What they did--since I didn't go with them, I didn't know, but at the prom they were obviously drinking. I know we went to a house. Another good friend there at Immaculate Heart, we went to her house and we had breakfast at her house. The girls had really been drinking at the country club that we went to, I think it was the Riviera Country Club out on the beach. I remember they used to go out, out of the dance hall and go out and walk on the beach. That's what they were doing, drinking.

Espino

So it sounds like it was a pretty active social life. Were there any other like political issues that you were interested in or social issues?

Davis

That didn't happen till I went to UCLA.

Espino

Do you want to talk a little bit about that at UCLA?

Davis

Let me finish first with Immaculate Heart. When I went to college from Mozart Street, the neighbors that I know told me that I was the first person that they knew who had gone to college. When I graduated, the night I came home there they were in my yard and on my porch with goodies, cakes, Jell-O, ice cream, and they gave me a party, they said because they expected me to fail, and I didn't. I graduated.

Espino

Wow. That must have been a wonderful moment. When you graduated from Immaculate Heart or when you graduated from--

Davis

From Immaculate Heart.

Espino

How did your parents feel, do you remember?

Davis

Really great.

Espino

Did they cry?

Davis

I don't remember.

Espino

You said in our last interview that going to Sacred Heart High School, that it gave you confidence and it made you feel like you were equal to other people. So did you feel like--

Davis

Equal to the Italians, anyway.

Espino

When you went to Immaculate Heart, did you also feel like you were equal to the other students?

Davis

Well, I felt pretty good about myself, I think a little arrogant, because I remember one time my father and I were putting up curtain rods for my mother. She had new drapes for the room. And my father was measuring and I was supposed to convert the inches or something to feet, but I did it wrong, and I remember having to really look at myself because my father was able to do it right. He always had a little bit more than I did, you know.

Espino

So you were feeling pretty good about yourself and confident, although some people in your community weren't sure if you were going to be able to be successful.

Davis

Yes. Yes.

Espino

But you didn't feel that way. You felt like you could.

Davis

Yes, most of the girls that were in the neighborhood went to secretary school, Woodward College. They all learned to type and shorthand.

Espino

Did they try to discourage you from going?

Davis

No.

Espino

Did they tease you or make fun of you?

Davis

No, and my parents were very supportive. I had a lot of homework every night, and I slept in the living room on the couch that made into a bed so I was able to stay up late. They always made sure that I ate and that I had breakfast before I went to school and took my lunch and had dinner. But I didn't have to do dishes or anything. Saturday, I used to help with the housework. I remember vacuuming, cleaning, and doing whatever had to be done. Saturday was also a day for going to church. We used to go to confession. I used to go with this neighbor girl from Sacred Heart, Frances. I'd walk across the street to her house, and then we would go together.

Espino

Do you want to talk a little bit about UCLA now?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Did any of your friends follow you from Immaculate Heart to UCLA?

Davis

No. Just Evelyn was the only one that was going to UCLA.

Espino

Evelyn March.

Davis

Yes.

Davis

She also went to UCLA.

Davis

No, she didn't go to UCLA. She just went to Immaculate Heart. I don't remember that she graduated, though.

Espino

She didn't receive her B.A. or her B.S.

Davis

No, and she disappeared. I never heard from them again. I know recently at Sacred Heart we were looking over the people that are still here, and I heard that she had died. So I don't know whether she died or if she lived or--

Espino

What kind of social group did you find at UCLA?

Davis

Oh, it was wonderful. During the lunch hour we used to spend it at the noon class of dancing, and I had a wonderful time dancing. I was a good dancer. In fact, I used to go not with the graduate students but with a lower-classman, because they used to participate in all these activities. The graduates didn't. They were married or going to get married or they used to live at the Co-ops. So I used to go, and the Bruin used to advertise events that were going on in the weekend and so on, and it turns out that all these students that I knew were sons of Hollywood producers and I don't know what else, directors, and they were very liberal. We used to go to all kinds of events, supporting different activities.

Davis

I remember when Paul Robeson came to Los Angeles. That was in the Bruin, and a whole bunch of us got together. I guess I used to drive with them, go in their car. But we went to the--I think it's the Olympic Theater on Figueroa and Olympic. He was appearing there, and I remember that they were real bold. They were mainly boys, and they said, "Let's go backstage and meet Paul Robeson." So I went with them. I was with them, and I got to meet Paul Robeson. I remember telling him that he didn't sing anything in Spanish, and he agreed that he didn't. So again, he came back--this was a year later or so--and again we went to see him and went backstage. Oh, but before, the concert in that second time, he sang--Los Cuatro Generales was a song that I think was from the revolution in Spain, and he sang it in Spanish. So when I went back to see him, he remembered me, and he said, "Did you like what I sang for you?"

Espino

He remembered you.

Davis

He remembered me. He was a wonderful fellow.

Davis

The kids, we used to go in their homes. Sometimes they would have fundraisers for different authors or directors, and I would go there and just mingle with everybody. One time I remember we were at some house, and Buddy Collette--do you know him at all?

Espino

No.

Davis

He's a great jazz artist and is well known in the community. He used to--he was obviously very liberal, too--used to appear at these houses with his band. The one time I remember going there on a Saturday, and the drummer in his band was dancing with me and everything, and then he invited me for a cup of coffee after they got through. Well, I think Buddy Collette saw us and knew what was going on, because he later came to me and said not to go with him, because he was a womanizer and would probably try to take advantage of me. So I didn't go with him.

Davis

But Buddy and I became friends. I used to go to his appearances at nightclubs sometimes, and I would always say hello. One time I took my son, who was playing drums at that time. He still plays drums. He has a band of his own that he calls together whenever he has someplace to go. But it was some fundraiser for Bradley, and I took my son, and he let him sit in on his band, playing the drums.

Espino

This was much later.

Davis

Oh yes, this was way after when I was working.

Espino

So most of these kids that you hung out with at UCLA that would take you to these concerts and you got to meet these really interesting musicians, were they primarily non-Mexican or were they--

Davis

No, they were non-Mexican. But they didn't hesitate to go into East L.A. if there was some function there that was supporting--I remember supporting a man [Gilbert Canales], I can't think of his name, but he was the first one that I remember ever running for the assembly.

Espino

From East Los Angeles. Before Roybal ran for office.

Davis

Oh yes, way before. I can't think of his name, but his father was a baker. I remember that. And he won. He didn't last very long. I think he had been drinking and smashed a car into a pole or something, so that was the end of his career. Other people who ran for assembly didn't make it at that early time.

Espino

But your friends from UCLA would go to fundraisers--

Davis

Oh yes, they would go everywhere.

Espino

--in East Los Angeles.

Davis

Yes. And we used to have political discussions. I mean, that's the most liberal that I got. I often wondered if the FBI--they used to come and sometimes like with the Paul Robeson concert, they were all there in the parking lot taking pictures of the drivers, of the car license, and pictures of the people that were there, too.

Espino

You could identify them? You could identify who the--

Davis

Oh yes. They had suits and hats.

Espino

So they stood out.

Davis

Yes. What kind of clothing would your friends be wearing? They wouldn't be wearing suits?

Davis

No, just T-shirts--or not T-shirts, but they used to use polo shirts more.

Espino

They did, polo shirts at that time.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

This was much after the war, and people were no longer wearing the zoot suit or suits of that early style. When you say liberal, how would you define that? What did liberal mean at that time? What kind of ideas would be a liberal idea?

Davis

Well, working for civil rights of people, trying to integrate the schools. I remember mainly going to supporting causes for either people or votings or something, or running for something.

Espino

How about politics relating to Communism or unionism?

Davis

I used to hear about Russia, but it never impressed me. I used to think that it didn't sound so smart to me or something. So I would hear them. Well, in fact, some of the things we used to go to lectures. I remember that the church [Catholic] and the Newman Club and the Hillel Club, I think, were off campus, and they used to have speakers and different events, and I used to go. I met Dorothy Healy there. She was there speaking one time and I got to--I didn't think anything about it. I thought she was fine. But we used to go there for different things that they would have.

Espino

So then like, for example, the FBI agents, it wasn't because they were looking for Communists. It was because they were looking for anybody who had ideas about integration.

Davis

No, they were looking for Communists.

Espino

They were looking for Communists.

Davis

Yes. This friend of mine [Marion Graff] that I go visit all the time and we became friends, and she was with CSO [Community Service Organization], too, and she's Jewish. She's ninety years old now. She had been told that because of her activities--she was very liberal, too, and she was a member of CSO and, I don't know, of some other community groups. Well, her brother was in the navy, and he got up as high--just before admiral, and her brother disowned her and her mother because--he said that he did not become an admiral because she was a Communist.

Davis

So now that she's retired and all, through the Privacy Act [Freedom of Information Act], she wrote to the FBI and asked for her records. It took months. They were reviewing the request, and it had to go to someplace else and so on. She finally got a package like that [gestures] that cost her thirty dollars for the reproduction of. When I went to visit her, I looked at it, and the things were just the things that I was doing, going to see a s_____, integration

of the schools. And they just said she was there, her license number was there, or that an informant had said that she was there and had talked about whatever issue was pertinent. I looked at her, and I couldn't figure out what they would have--but in those days they were just horrible.

Espino

But she was never officially or unofficially Communist.

Davis

She said she looked into the party, but she disagreed with them. So I don't know if she actually joined them at the time for a short period, but she didn't keep going to meetings or anything.

Espino

Right, and some of the interviews from that period, for example, with Alice McGrath or with Charlotta Bass, who was the editor of the American Eagle, African American newspaper, they would say that anybody who was antiracist was considered a Communist. So you didn't really have to have the ideology, but if you believed in integration.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

So you're sort of agreeing with that, too.

Davis

Yes. Yes. Later on in life I remember I worked for Congressman George E. Brown. He let me work out of my house. He brought me a desk and a telephone and a chair, so that I would be comfortable, and I took care of my house and worked for him at the same time. So at one time, I don't remember, there was some committee that met to identify the organizations that were suspect or outright Communist, and he got a copy of that, because there was a committee, and he got a copy of the committee report.

Davis

I saw it, and even MAOF [Mexican American Opportunity Foundation], which is the Mexican American Opportunities--I forget--Agency or something, they were listed. I had to really laugh, because I know Dionicio Morales very well. I was a project officer, when I worked for the Department of Labor, to MAOF and to the Watts Labor Community [Action Committee] and TELACU [The East Los Angeles Community Union] and everything around here. And that man couldn't be more conservative [laughter], although he supports all the good things and makes available all kinds of opportunity for people, women in particular. But to say that he was a suspect or possibly Communist, I have to laugh.

Espino

That's funny.

Davis

That's how ridiculous it got.

Espino

Right. Right, and that was in the sixties. That was much later.

Davis

Oh yes. Yes.

Espino

That's interesting. So did they have groups on campus at UCLA that were Communist or dealt with issues, maybe not necessarily Communist issues, but-

Davis

Yes, there was groups. I used to go to some of the discussions, but they were usually encouraging people to vote and to support the good causes. But I know they told me once that they were meeting at somebody's house and that they had to abandon the house. They had to leave through the window because the FBI had come to inspect the place and disrupt the meeting.

Espino

And these were friends of yours?

Davis

Well, they were the guys that I knew at school.

Espino

But these guys were not in the science department.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Some of them were.

Davis

They were in the science--they were geniuses. One of the guy, I think he was a physicist, when he was there at school, he invented a dance step that was very much like the waltz, and I remember him coming to the class and showing the people who went to the class, and I got to dance with him. It was very interesting. Later in life when I was married, I remember seeing his picture on the front of a Life magazine, and he had been barred from Las Vegas because he also invented a way of winning blackjack, and cleaned out the house. So he was forbidden from going to Las Vegas and had his picture on the front of the Life magazine.

Espino

Oh, that's interesting.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

So when you were a student, and it sounds like it was a really exciting time to be at UCLA, how did you manage your science with some of the other issues that you were concerned about, integration and things like that?

Davis

Well, mainly it was when I was going out to these places on the weekend and so on. It didn't take time from--and the boys, all of the boys were pretty liberal, too. One of the animal caretakers, he wasn't a student, he had us over to his house one time, and we had a seder. I remember we drank so much wine, we were ready to go under the table and to proceed with the seder. But we enjoyed it. I remember going home. It was Al [Lepp]--I can't think of his last name, but Al, who was much older than us, was driving, and I and Toby [Kaufman] were sitting in the back, and he kept turning around to see what was going on. He kept expecting us to do something or something, but I was glad to get home, because that was some evening [unclear].

Davis

Later on Al married this girl--I don't remember where he met her, but he had the marriage, I think, at this animal caretaker's home, and they made a canopy with four sticks of wood with a thing, and the Co-op baker made the cake in the form of--I don't remember what it was like, but it was like a half a bell or something. It was a wonderful time, I remember, all this. I used to babysit for him after that.

Espino

I guess my question is more like did you think about using your education for your political views after graduate school, or were you planning on going into still a science field, continue with your desire to be a scientist, after you graduated from college with your master's?

Davis

I thought I would use it as science. That's why I went to USC [University of Southern California], because it was a medical department. I think it's now the Norris Cancer Center.

Espino

That's where you got your first job after you graduated from UCLA.

Davis

Yes.

Davis

Yes, and then I got pregnant. In fact, I worked right up to the time that she was born. I remember we used to do surgery on animals, and I forget his name now--oh, Dr. Sinzer. I used to help him in the surgery, and I was getting so big, and he used to say not to worry, they had plenty of sutures; that they would put me up on the bed where--we used dogs then. And he said, "There are a number of doctors around that could help you." Well, I remember he took a survey of the doctors, and not one of them had delivered a baby for years. He was the one with the most experience, and that was a long time ago. But I quit about a week before I had the baby, and went to court. I remember that I was interested in the outcome of the trial. They were boys--but I don't remember. I just remember going. I used to take the streetcar and go downtown.

Espino

For one specific case that you were following.

Davis

Yes, but I don't remember what it was.

Espino

And then you graduated from UCLA in 1955, is that correct?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

So that when we come back next time, we can talk about your marriage, which was in 1952?

Davis

'53.

Espino

'53 when you got married, and then you graduated in '55, and then you had your first child after that. So we're going to stop right now and we'll talk about those issues. Thanks, Grace.

Davis

Good.[End of interview]

1.4. Session 4 (September 19, 2008)

Espino

This is Virginia Espino, and today is September 19, 2008, and I'm interviewing Grace Montañez Davis at her home in Highland Park.

Espino

Last time we ended with some discussion about your social life at UCLA and your interest in science, and today I wanted to talk a little bit about your personal life and your marriage to your husband. Can you tell me how you met? Maybe his name and how you met him?

Davis

His name is Raymond C. Davis. He was actually born a Whittaker, but his mother died during the flu epidemic, and his father had the three kids, which he couldn't manage by himself, so Ray was adopted by an aunt whose name was Davis, so he became Davis. I was going to UCLA at the time, and I remember I was attending a function somewhere in South Central, something that I had seen in the Bruin that was some liberal, probably, event. I was standing behind him waiting to sign in, and when I got to sign in, I noticed that he lived just a couple of blocks from where I did. So I signed in, and he was still there, and I turned to him and told him that he lived near me and that I lived near him, and we started to talk. I don't remember; I think he asked me out then. The first date that we had, we went to El Cholo. I forget what street that's on. We had a Mexican dinner or something.

Davis

But we kept on dating. He was interested in getting acquainted with the missions of California, so I know every weekend we would take a trip to one mission or another. I don't remember going any other places or anything. I brought him home and introduced him to my family. I remember eating there and so on. We had some friends--I don't remember their names, but I remember Ray had asked me to marry him, and I had some doubts, and I remember talking to her about it. But I guess I overcame it, because we got

married April 10, 1953. We didn't have a honeymoon or anything, but that night we went to the Hollywood Bowl to a concert, and then we came to my house and broke the news to my parents. I remember my father [Alfred Viallescua Montañez]. His head was bent down and he was very disappointed, but he didn't say anything, and I don't remember what my mother [Belen Mendoza Montañez] said. But we spent the night there, I remember.

Espino

When did you meet him? Do you remember the year that you met him?

Davis

Probably '51 or '52.

Espino

So you probably dated for about a year and a half. Last time we talked, you told me about a lot of the young men friends that you had that you would go out with, colleagues from your class that you would go to different events with. I'm just wondering, what was it about Ray that was different?

Davis

He was older. The students that I used to go out with, they weren't dates. We were just a group that used to go out together, and they were undergraduates. Here I met somebody who had already graduated. He went to the University of Michigan and studied, I guess, to be--I don't know if a teacher or a journalist, because he worked as a journalist in New York. He was the editor of--I forget, that magazine that's one of the food magazines [Family Circle]. I can't think of one.

Espino

What, Bon Appétit?

Davis

No, some other household--

Espino

House and Garden?

Davis

No.

Espino

Ladies Home Journal, something like that?

Davis

Something like that. Then when he came here, he was working in a factory right near his home as a supervisor of the assembly line, and then during the summer I know--this was after we got married, because I know he was an editor of a picture magazine. I don't remember; it didn't last very long, but it was a very nice magazine, and I remember he did that during the summer. He used to teach during the year and would usually not work during the summer, but that time he got a job.

Espino

So he was older and he was established.

Davis

He was nine years older than I.

Espino

Nine years older. Oh, okay. What was it like for you, dating someone who was not Mexican. Was that a problem for your family?

Davis

No, because most of the kids, although they were non-Hispanic, the only Hispanics at UCLA was the ones before I started to live there. I used to go with these guys, students from East L.A., and they were taking different classes. They were all on the GI Bill, and my mother never complained about that. She was perfectly all right with it. They used to take me to football games, too.

Espino

So why do you think your father was not pleased when you announced your marriage?

Davis

Because I hadn't had a proper marriage with the family.

Espino

What would that look like, a proper marriage?

Davis

I don't know, just with a wedding dress and some bridesmaids, and a church wedding.

Espino

Do you think that they would have liked you to have gotten married in the Catholic Church?

Davis

Oh yes. Yes.

Espino

And Ray, was he religious or did he have a religion?

Davis

No, he didn't. He's never been religious. He claims he's an atheist or something.

Espino

But he knew your family before you got married?

Davis

Yes, and he had taken Spanish, I guess, because I know he used to be able to communicate with them.

Espino

He spoke Spanish to your parents?

Davis

Yes. Yes.

Espino

How did your brothers get along with him?

Davis

Oh, okay. There were no problems there.

Espino

Then after you got married, you were still at UCLA.

Davis

Right.

Espino

And when did you start to get involved with the CSO [Community Service Organization]?

Davis

I don't remember if it was before my children were born or not, but we lived in Lincoln Heights just down the street from the high school, Lincoln High School, and they started a chapter of CSO in Lincoln Heights; also a chapter of ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], so we belonged to both. Mainly I guess we used to go to activities that the East L.A. CSO used to have. They were big enough they used to have dinners, and I don't remember other activities, but some of the committee meetings and voter registration. The ACLU chapter, it was because of them that when we had the [Edward Ross] Roybal election for supervisor, that they helped us work up an affidavit so we can document the irregularities that occurred. Some of the big-name lawyers [Margolis] used to come. I don't remember their names right offhand, but they used to come to the meetings and talk to us.

Espino

And your husband was just involved with you and the CSO?

Davis

He was just as involved. I know he was involved with the liberal movement in New York, so he was just as involved, and the event that we met at was some, I think, a labor activity. So I was not that involved. It was really through him that I became involved, and he would say it was important to go to that

meeting or so on, so I started to go, and I evolved, I guess, as a leader. After the Roybal campaign I headed up the Fair Elections Committee.

Espino

So your first involvement was the Roybal campaign?

Davis

Well, I had been involved before. I knew when we had elections. But that was my first real involvement. To begin with, before we were involved in voter registration, and my husband was a registrar.

Espino

Was this with the CSO, the voter registration?

Davis

Yes. You actually registered yourself, and then we used to have campaigns where we got a list of the registrars from the registrar of voters. They made it available. And I remember when I headed up the voter registration drive, I used to call every one of the registrars, whether we knew them or not, and ask them if they wanted to register that weekend. We would go and pick them up and take them to the place, and if they didn't have a table and chair, we would get one somewhere and make those available. Then we would go back after how many hours and take them home. So we got to know the registrars, whether they were Republican or Democrat. It didn't make any difference.

Espino

Then would you get people to them or--

Davis

No, but they were usually at supermarkets, post offices, or places that had a lot of human traffic, and they would then call out to them as they were going by, did they want to register to vote.

Espino

How popular was that?

Davis

It was something that appealed to people. I think we registered something like twenty-five hundred people one time. We did very well. I know, however, my husband one time, he used to go door-to-door sometimes to register, and this woman that he had approached called the registrar of voters and complained about him. I don't remember the complaint, if it had to do with sex or what, but he was suspended by the registrar of voters.

Espino

Your husband?

Davis

Yes. I remember. This very dear friend of ours, Marion Graff, she's ninety years old now, she was very active in CSO. She was Jewish, but she was very active, as well as other members. She was an office manager, and she used to mimeograph and type minutes of the meetings or make forms that we needed and everything. I remember she had this mimeograph machine, and we used to make many copies. Like the affidavits, we were able to make a lot of those and give them to people. But she also did a lot of work for CSO, any of the clerical work.

Davis

There were a lot of union members, representing different unions. I remember the retail clerks [Local 770], the garment industry [International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, ILGWU], the butchers' union [Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, Local 563]. In fact, the man who was president of the butchers' union, J. J. Rodriguez, later became the head of the L.A. County Federation of Labor. He was the president. I remember serving with him one time when there was a proposition--I think it was Proposition 14--that was against housing and so on. So we were conducting a big campaign against the proposition, and he and I were co-chairs for the county.

Espino

So your work with the CSO started off as you attending some meetings, and then it evolved into you taking on leadership roles, like of this campaign that you were just mentioning.

Davis

Yes, and working. The women used to do all the cooking and the serving whenever they had a fundraiser. Then I used to go and usually help serve. I didn't do much cooking yet.

Espino

That's interesting. Do you think that that was an expectation, that the women, because they were women, they needed to do--

Davis

Yes, this was just taken for granted. Women did all the clerical work and all the work that had to do with any food that was generated. The men in the labor unions were very active. There was a committee, a labor committee, and I remember they used to get involved in voter registration. They would do the pickup and taking them to the places. From the butchers' union we used to get donations of lunchmeats to give to the volunteers. The retail clerks used to bring the bread and all the other ingredients. The pottery workers, I remember their donating pottery to give as rewards for the highest registrar that registered the most people. They were very active.

Davis

They used to also--I remember one time leading this group. They used to have car caravans with a loudspeaker, and we used to go through the neighborhood and call out to people about registering to vote and about voting for Roybal. I remember I had a sign up on top of my car, and we were going down North Broadway. I remember this neighborhood on Alpine Street near Elysian Park, and that's a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood, and so I remember leading the caravan and going all through that neighborhood. I remember the labor people were very pleased, because they said that was something they weren't aware of.

Espino

And were people outside on the sidewalks?

Davis

Yes, and the porch.

Espino

Would they make any gestures to you or--

Davis

Sometimes.

Espino

Like what kinds of things would they--

Davis

Well, usually because it was Roybal, we had a lot of support. On the other hand, my husband used to go door-to-door encouraging people to vote for him, and he would take our children with him. Many times they would come home all brokenhearted because people would be very negative with him, called him--because they were supporting a Hispanic. I don't remember what they called him. When they were doing the same thing for [Tom] Bradley, they were called "nigger-lovers."

Espino

Oh, so they had a name for your--Anglo. Your husband was an Anglo.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

They had names for people like that who supported Latino candidates. You don't remember what it was?

Davis

No. No, I don't remember.

Espino

What year was your first child born? Do you remember?

Davis

1956.

Espino

1956. So then your involvement started in about 1954, from what I can gather, and this was something that you were involved in for many years then.

Davis

Yes. In '53 and '54--I don't know how many more years--we lived off of Huntington Drive. It was a place called Commodore. We lived in this small one-bedroom apartment, and I remember I was going to school, because my husband had a typewriter, and I typed my master's degree thesis there. Then we took it in to the department, and somebody binded the thing. They used to copy the typewritten page and then bind it with a cover. So we had our thesis that way. I don't know how they do it nowadays, but I imagine they do it with a computer or something. But I remember living at that house on Commodore when I got my degree [Masters in Microbiology].

Davis

My mother and father and my brother Rudolf [Rodólfo] and my husband went to the graduation. I remember my brother helping me on with the cap and gown. They were all very proud.

Espino

I'll bet. Yes, what a great moment. So you commuted then from--

Davis

Yes.

Espino

--from was that El Sereno or what part of Huntington?

Davis

That's more like El Sereno. That's on the border.

Espino

It's even further than Lincoln Heights where you were living before.

Davis

Yes. Not that far; just on the border.

Espino

And you no longer drove to school with the young men.

Davis

No. I went on the bus, I remember. I'm trying to remember. I was living in Westwood when I met my husband.

Espino

And he was also living in Westwood.

Davis

Yes, he lived on Barrington, and I lived on Glendon right off of Olympic, so that was very close to each other.

Espino

And then when you got married, you moved out east.

Davis

We moved to Commodore off of Huntington Drive.

Espino

And you decided to wait to have children? You don't want to have children--

Davis

Yes, till he got tenure in school, which took about three years.

Espino

Was that hard for you, to wait to have children?

Davis

No, because I was going to school, so I couldn't; wouldn't have the time for kids then. Even when I was pregnant, I was working for SC. I was married already, and I was pregnant with my first child, and I was working for Dr. Goldman and Dr. Zinger. He was the author of a book that the medical schools used to use; it had something to do with urology. He used to do surgery there.

They had a building right near the county hospital, up the hill from the county hospital. They didn't have a medical school there at the time, but that was the beginning of the school, and they were doing a lot of research there and so on. The doctor always teased me that if I had the baby while I was working, that they could use the animal trough that we used to put dogs up on, and that we had a g____, you know, and everything. But then when he surveyed all the doctors that were in the building, he was the one--I think he hadn't delivered a baby for twelve years, and he was the one that was closest. So I wouldn't have done very well.

Davis

I remember quitting about a week before I had my child, and spent the time going to court. There was a case--I don't remember what it was, but I used to take the streetcar downtown and go to the courthouse and spend the day listening to the court. I knew it had something to do with, yes, pachucos or something.

Espino

Oh, in the fifties. I wonder what that case would be. Was it written up in the newspaper as well?

Davis

I don't remember.

Espino

You don't remember how you heard about it.

Davis

No.

Espino

If you knew somebody who was involved.

Davis

No. It was just something that was in the newspaper.

Espino

Or maybe, because you were already at that time involved with the CSO.

Davis

Yes, and we were interested in that, yes.

Espino

I also want to talk about how your family responded to you not having children right away. Do you think that--

Davis

No, they didn't say anything. They knew I was still going to school.

Espino

So you didn't feel pressure from your parents. It was okay for you to be married and not have kids.

Davis

Yes. In fact, when we lived on Commodore, I remember my brother Chico, who was addicted to drugs, came over to the house, and I don't know where we got the mattress, but he had a mattress, and he slept in the living room, and he cold-turkeyed to get rid of the addiction.

Espino

At your house.

Davis

Yes. He was very sick, I remember.

Espino

Did you take care of him?

Davis

Yes, as best we could. We were both working, but when we were there.

Espino

Did he stay clean after that?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Wow. That was before you had kids, though.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

The other thing I'm interested in is that in one of our first interviews you talked about how your mother never worked outside the home, except for that one time she worked at the elementary cafeteria, and that your father didn't want her to work.

Davis

Right.

Espino

How did she react to your lifestyle? It seems really different.

Davis

She liked it, because she liked being a housekeeper. I remember she was very clean. During the war she used to do shirts, all the neighborhood, all the young men, Italian men and so on. She was a very good ironing. I remember the house on Mozart, when she lived there, there were a lot of floods or earthquakes in Mexico, and I remember she used to collect clothes from the neighbors. I don't know where she used to take them, but she used--in fact, for Easter my brother Chico had given me the money to buy a dress and a hat and gloves and a purse and shoes, and somehow my mother took the shoes and put them in her donations, and I remember I had to go wherever they were keeping them-- I don't know if it was church or what--but to get my shoes back, because I needed them for graduation.

Espino

But how did she feel about you working? How did she feel about you not being home?

Davis

No, they had accepted that I had had a higher education, and all of these were the consequences of it. They used to support me a lot when I was going to school, making sure that I studied. In fact, if I ever wanted to go bowling with the church group, they had to make sure that I had done my homework before I went, you know.

Espino

So they saw your lifestyle as part of your higher education. It required different standards. Even your father, who expected your mother to stay home.

Davis

Yes, and I remember later in life my father used to iron his pants and my brother's pants, because, he said, they were too heavy for my mother. But he would do it early in the morning where nobody would see him.

Espino

Why do you think he would do them early in the morning?

Davis

Well, because he saw it as something heavier for my mother to do, and so he would do them. He would also hang out the clothes sometimes early in the morning so nobody will see him.

Espino

Nobody meaning the neighbors?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

So that wasn't appropriate for a man to be hanging out the clothes.

Davis

I guess it was woman's work.

Espino

He looked at it as woman's work.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

But when you lived your life, they never criticized the way that you did things?

Davis

No.

Espino

How about your husband? Did he have expectations of you as far as domestic roles?

Davis

No.

Espino

What kind of cooking, cleaning?

Davis

He used to help with it.

Espino

He was supportive.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

How did you divide up the different responsibilities of your home?

Davis

I guess sometimes if I was busy with something and couldn't cook, then he would cook or take care of the laundry or whatever.

Espino

He did his laundry?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Then what about childcare when your children were born?

Davis

Oh, then he was great with the kids. He used to always spend a lot of time with them, and even after we got a divorce, he used to come every weekend and take them out someplace, and I could go then wherever I needed to go and not worry, because he was taking care of them. In fact, I remember some nights purposely not coming home so he would have to stay there, and he already had this other girlfriend, and she would worry about why he was spending so much time at my house. But I used to do it on purpose.

Espino

That's funny. So getting back a little bit to your work with the CSO, I want to talk some more about--you know, we kind of went into your family life, but I wanted to talk a little bit about some of the people that were involved in the CSO, like the prominent people like, for example, Soledad Alatorre. Did you know her?

Davis

No.

Espino

She was apparently one of the leaders of the CSO with Bert Corona. Was this much later than--

Davis

No. Bert Corona came, and I don't know if he belonged to the CSO someplace else, but actually, I don't remember him at CSO. I remember him with MAPA [Mexican American Political Association].

Espino

Okay, so that was much later then. Maybe we can go back a little bit and talk about Edward Roybal. Did you know him?

Davis

Oh yes. He was a prominent leader in CSO. I don't remember working for him when he was running for council. I think I was still a student. But when I knew him, he was a councilman, and then he was very active in CSO. We used to have conventions, too, and I remember him being at the convention. He used to tease J. J. Rodriguez, who was the president of the butchers' union, and he used to say J. J. hadn't cut a steak in years and he didn't deserve to be representing the butchers' union. We used to laugh at it all the time. But I don't remember him being a butcher at any time. I've always known him as the head of the butchers' union. I knew his wife [Andrea] and two of his children --four; I guess there were two girls and two boys, and one of his sons was active in the butchers' union.

Davis

I think after J. J. died, one of my daughters [Deirdra] was having a fundraiser for one of their friends who had gotten cancer and was very sick and so on, and they needed some money, I guess. The butchers' union, the son, J. J.'s son [J.J. Jr.], made available a box full of hot dogs so that they could serve them and raise money that way.

Espino

So then these people were also your friends as well as people that you worked with on community organizing.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Did you socialize with them?

Davis

Yes, because mainly it was something to do with CSO, and we were either registering voters or campaigning. There were other people. I remember this man Frank [Lopez]. I don't remember his last name. He lived in Mount Washington, and I think he was a social worker. But he ran for the assembly, and again, me and my husband worked in the campaign. They were other--like in Monterey Park, that's how we met George Brown. When Roybal was running for supervisor, George Brown had a headquarters on North Broadway and Griffin Avenue, and he made it available to the Roybal campaign, so it was a George Brown-Roybal headquarters, and that way we didn't have to--didn't have the money to spend. But he made it available to us, and so we got to know him. I think in exchange we did some mailings for him, the volunteers. When he got elected, I guess he asked me to work for him, so I did. I handled all the veterans and immigration, Social Security, any of those federal programs. People would call with a complaint, and I would contact the government agency on behalf of George Brown.

Espino

When you say "people," would that be just anyone, or specifically the Latino community?

Davis

No, whoever would call. I mean, there would either be people that I had worked with or people that they told that they can call George Brown and get help on these issues.

Espino

So how would you describe his politics, George Brown?

Davis

Oh, very favorable.

Espino

But I mean, would you consider them conservative, liberal--

Davis

Liberal.

Espino

--very radical left?

Davis

No, not radical left, just very liberal.

Espino

And he was supportive of diverse candidates like Roybal.

Davis

Yes, he was. He was very good, and we supported him for assembly, and then later when he ran for Congress, we worked for him again.

Espino

How would you describe the ethnic makeup of the coalition in CSO and the coalition to elect Roybal? Because George Brown was not Mexican. He wasn't African American.

Davis

Most of the people--well, like his campaign manager was Roger Johnson, and he'd been with him since city council and had always been his campaign manager. He was very good. We just accepted him because he knew what he was talking about. We used to complain because we thought he was spending too much time on the Westside.

Espino

Are you talking about Roybal?

Davis

Roybal, yes, and we used to blame Roger Johnson, his campaign manager, for that. But the district that he was representing went all the way to the Westside, so he had to go there, too. But we used to complain. There were some people in the labor movement that weren't Hispanic, either. I remember George--not--I don't remember his name; it was Taki, an Asian, and he was with the retail clerks and was very active in the labor [committee] and so on, and he came to CSO meetings, too. But mainly there were Mexicans.

Espino

Principally Mexican, but you had one Asian American, and you had Anglo--or were they Anglo or were they Jewish supporters, do you think?

Davis

He had Jewish supporters, and the only ones that I remember having anything to do with us were the garment workers, and they were Jewish. But they weren't part of CSO. They were just there supporting us on different issues. Most of the labor people were Hispanic.

Espino

Some of the pictures that I saw of the voter registration campaign looks 100 percent Latino, so I'm just--and I know that it was a diverse coalition of different groups, so I'm just interested in how that broke down.

Davis

Yes, but mainly on the Eastside we were Hispanic.

Espino

What about African American? Did you have any people coming up from places like South Central or other areas?

Davis

Congressman [Augustus] "Gus" [Freeman] Hawkins has always been a supporter of Roybal [since he was an assemblyman].

Espino

He's African American.

Davis

I don't know if he died. I remember seeing something in the paper about it--he was a fair-skinned Negro, but after they became congressmen, it was a three-pronged thing all the time, Gus Hawkins, George Brown, and Roybal.

Espino

What do you mean?

Davis

In Congress.

Espino

Can you explain that a little bit?

Davis

You could always depend on the others' support. They were always doing things together.

Espino

They were all three congressmen at the same time?

Davis

Yes, for a long time.

Espino

Do you think that they had a positive impact on Los Angeles?

Davis

Oh yes.

Espino

Can you remember any specific programs or initiatives that they might have gotten through?

Davis

No, just whatever affected the Mexican community, they were supportive of. I remember we had the Brown v. the Board of Education about desegregation. George Brown, I remember, he was an assemblyman then. But I remember he helped us a lot with getting information about the suit. I'm sure Gus Hawkins was supporting us, too. I think I was working for him [Brown] then. There was a hearing, a congressional hearing in Los Angeles, and there was some publication by the legislature, and he made it available for us, and I went and testified at the hearing. This was the beginning, before we had the real suit. I remember having that hearing, and I worked for him. When I was with Bradley

was when they had the board of education; actually, the suit. We had an ongoing committee of citizens, and I was on that, representing the mayor. I know we used to have frequent meetings. I don't remember; it just had to do with desegregation.

Espino

But were schools segregated in Los Angeles?

Davis

Oh yes.

Espino

Can you tell me which ones were? Because where you grew up in Albion, that was a public school, and that was integrated.

Davis

No, that was integrated. I think most of the segregated schools were near Orange County, and I think the schools on the Eastside, though I didn't go to school there, so I don't know.

Espino

Well, there was the lawsuit Mendez v. Westminster. That was a segregation or a desegregation type of lawsuit. That was in Orange County, and that happened before Brown v. Board of Education.

Davis

Yes. Right.

Espino

Maybe that's what you're remembering, or--

Davis

Probably, yes.

Espino

And the CSO participated somehow in that campaign?

Davis

Yes, but I don't know how active I was with the CSO. I guess I was active till--I wasn't active when I became deputy mayor.

Espino

No, that was much later. I'm going to pause it for a minute because someone's coming in.[Recorder turned off.]

Espino

Okay, Grace, we're going to get back to the interview, and I wanted to ask you about some of the issues that were important to you when you were working with the CSO. You talked a little bit about desegregation.

Davis

One issue that was very important was the naturalization of immigrants to become citizens. Alvina Carillo, a member of CSO, was the director, and she mainly was teaching classes, and then there were people who became teachers. I remember I was a teacher, because I was expecting my firstborn, and we used the basement of the Lincoln Heights library. I used to teach in Spanish, and my husband taught in English. We had a couple of people who spoke English and wanted to become citizens. I remember when the people, the ladies in the class, for the birth of my child they gave me all kinds of things that they made, little booties and dresses. So it was really great having the first child.

Davis

My father was a student of mine. He was the first one to--no, my mother was the first one. We [Ray C. Davis and Grace Davis] went to a graduation near the county hospital on Pleasant Avenue. It was a church there, and they were having a graduation of the people who were going to become citizens. I remember my husband and I went to that, because my mother was graduating. Roybal spoke at that meeting, and we decided right then and there that we would become teachers.

Davis

At that time we lived on the Westside, so we started the class on the West Los Angeles near Sawtelle [near the Veterans Administration Hospital], and we used a church or something again, because we had gone to a seminary, a Protestant seminary, and a man who belonged to CSO [in West L.A.] used to go to church there. We didn't use their facility; we used a storefront that was used by the sisters of social work, and I used to teach the class, and my husband taught English, too. I remember going around, leaving announcements about where the class was going to be and what time and so on. We got quite a good group of people when I was teaching the class there.

Davis

Then we moved to Lincoln Heights, so this man who was working at this Protestant church [in West L.A.], Delfino--what was his last name? Not Delfino, but--I don't remember. But he and his wife were active in CSO and they took over the class. He was a regular teacher, too, I think. I'm not sure about his wife. But then when we came to Lincoln Heights then, we got in touch with the library, and they made the basement available to us, and I just taught until I had my child, you know.

Espino

Was that library in Lincoln Heights?

Davis

Yes. It's the Lincoln Heights Library.

Espino

Is that the one that was next to the old Thrifty?

Davis

Yes, it's just down the block from Thrifty's.

Espino

So it was like on a corner near Sichel?

Davis

It's on the corner of Workman.

Espino

Yes, I remember that library.

Davis

Workman and Twenty-fourth.

Espino

Okay, and you would hold the classes in the basement.

Davis

In the basement. There was a little meeting room down there.

Espino

How would you advertise to the community?

Davis

Oh, in the paper, and we had flyers, and we distributed them to the stores and things.

Espino

What paper would you advertise in, do you remember?

Davis

The Lincoln Heights Bulletin.

Espino

The Lincoln Heights Bulletin.

Davis

My husband, when he first started to teach, was teaching journalism at Lincoln High School, and so he had his students become very aware of the newspapers in the area. In fact, if he had an article that used to be published in the school newspaper, and he would send copies to the neighborhood newspapers, the one in El Sereno, Highland Park, and so on. He made it a point to go and visit the editors of each paper so they would know about the article that he would be sending them from school.

Espino

That's really efficient. Also I'm sure he probably knew people at the Eastside Sun.

Davis

Yes, but during the Roybal campaign, he also knew all the papers on the Eastside, too.

Espino

What kind of people would come to your classes?

Davis

Mainly they were older people who had been here a long time, because I remember doing my mother. I don't remember if we did my father at the same time. But we filled out their papers for citizenship, and she had been here since 1980 or something. Most of the people that were at the class had been here a long time.

Espino

In the early--you said 1980, but you probably--

Davis

Eighteen.

Espino

1918.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Oh, that's really early. Were they primarily from Mexico?

Davis

Yes. We didn't have Latin Americans then. They came later. But they were mainly older people who had crossed the border. I remember my mother

saying she paid five cents to cross the border. They didn't require papers or anything.

Espino

It was a different time. What convinced them to become citizens so much later?

Davis

Well, they had learned English long before, but I guess CSO was making propaganda for people to become citizens to get the benefits of being a citizen and so on.

Espino

What kind of benefits were they promoting, do you remember?

Davis

Probably more jobs and things. I don't remember specifically. But there was a great movement, and that was a big effort on the part of CSO, to get people to become citizens, and besides teaching. Alvina taught classes for years. I remember going to a swearing-in in a courthouse, and it was interesting. The judge was asking the people, because they became citizens in their own language, so the judge would ask a question, and Alvina would interpret the question to the citizens, and then they would answer in Spanish. Well, I don't remember what the question was, but the judge was asking a question, and the way Alvina was interpreting it, I think it had to do with being Communist or something, because their answer, I think, was no, and it should have been yes. The judge was all upset. He had to--how many times he asked the question, and I remember we finally got to Alvina and got her to reverse her question so these people--but we were able to hold the ceremony in a court, where now it takes a whole convention center.

Espino

So maybe there were fifty people, thirty people who were--

Davis

Probably, yes.

Espino

And they were all older people, probably past fifty, sixty?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Was part of this campaign a desire to get more people registered to vote or who could vote?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Do you think that was part of it?

Davis

Yes. I remember it was a natural follow-up, because I went through this with my mother and father, and they enjoyed voting all the time.

Espino

Do you remember the first time your parents voted, who they voted for or what election?

Davis

I don't remember. My first election was when [Dwight D.] Eisenhower ran, and I was working for the polling place. I remember counting the votes. We used to count them by hand. We would take all night.

Espino

So you even worked for local politics. That was not in an organization that was not necessarily associated to a progressive or a Latino organization.

Davis

There were very few Hispanics running, but we all supported them, and then like George Brown and--I don't remember. I think for governor, when "Pat"

[Edmond Gerald] Brown ran, we supported him. I remember a CSO convention. I think it was in Fresno, and we were there, and Pat Brown came and spoke to us to get our vote. And we were mad about something. We wanted him to do something, but I don't remember what it was. He didn't do what it was we wanted.

Espino

I wonder what that would be.

Davis

But he was there. It was at some theater.

Espino

So what were some of the other big issues that you were in conflict with, say Roybal or other political leaders?

Davis

Well, not in conflict with. He was always supportive of--immigration was always an issue. Education was an issue. Jobs. I can't think of anything else, but those were things we worked on all the time. I remember we were involved with Julian Nava's election to the school board. He was a member of CSO, very active. In fact, we have a picture of him riding a bicycle and carrying a sign. I don't remember what the issue was, but it was for somebody or another. It was before the Roybal thing--I mean the--yes, the Roybal. But we got behind him and helped elect him, and we were successful there. Later on we had problems with him. He didn't always do things that we wanted him to do. I'm trying to remember.

Davis

He was on the board during the Brown v. the Board of Education, and we had this very large citizens group that used to meet every week or so, and we were discussing the different rules for desegregating the school district and so on. Within the big group, it had different committees that worked on different aspects, and I remember at one meeting these ladies who belonged to that particular committee were crying. We wanted to know what happened, and they had been assigned to meet with Julian Nava to get his approval or support on whatever the issue was. I think he had refused to meet with them

or something. I don't remember what he told them, but it really hurt them and they were crying.

Espino

Wow.

Davis

He was teaching at North Ridge, and I remember going to North Ridge to be interviewed. They had a radio station, and I was going to be interviewed by the radio station. We were walking on campus. This student was taking me to the studio, and at the distance I spotted Julian Nava. I wanted to call to him so that he would see that I was there, and I didn't want to shout or something, so I asked the student if he would please call Julian Nava. He said, "I'm sorry, but we don't talk to him." This was the Chicano studies student. He wasn't supporting them at that time or something. So we had problems with him at the end.

Espino

So he wasn't a popular leader?

Davis

He was at the beginning. He was very popular, very liberal and so on, and we got him elected and so on, because I remember we had something like--we used to call it a congress, and we were trying to decide who to back up for--I don't remember what position it was.

Espino

Would this be El Congreso de--was it people who speak Spanish or something like that? El Congreso de Pueblos de Habla Español, I think it was called, the congress.

Davis

But I don't remember what they called it. I know we went to Roybal to help decide about endorsing somebody. I don't remember who else besides Julian Nava. But I remember there was some problem that even Roybal at the time was concerned about.

Espino

That he wasn't agreeing with the position that you had taken on some issue.

Davis

I think so. We couldn't get him to endorse or whatever. I remember Art Torres, I think, was involved in that. I don't know if he was with the assembly at that time, but he was active, too. He wasn't active when I was with CSO. He came later.

Espino

Right. So some of the elected officials that CSO helped to put in leadership powers became unpopular with CSO?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Like Julian Nava is one example. What about Roybal? Did he stay in favor of the CSO?

Davis

Oh yes. Yes, we've always had a good time with him. He ran for supervisor. Then later on when he ran for Congress, we were behind him 100 percent. Did you hear that Belmont School is now being called the Roybal High School?

Espino

That's nice.

Davis

Yes. There's also a federal building next to the existing one that's named for him, too.

Espino

That was a tough campaign that he launched, and I think just the people that he was able to bring together was really important.

Davis

Yes. The naming of a building, he was not the head but a member of the Appropriations Committee, and he made the money available to build different buildings and so on, and so I think it was General Services named it after him. I remember--I don't know where I worked then or not, but Joe Sanchez, who was also very active in the CSO, and I went to meet with Roybal because we were so happy about the building and so on. I remember standing in the courtyard and swinging around with outstretched arms. We were so happy that we were getting some Hispanic recognition and so on.

Espino

This was of a building that was named after--

Davis

Roybal.

Espino

The one in East Los Angeles near--

Davis

No, this is downtown.

Espino

Because there is the Roybal--

Davis

There is a building, Roybal [Federal] Building.

Espino

Now.

Davis

Yes. It's a big one, too.

Espino

And he was still alive when it was named after him.

Davis

Oh yes. Oh yes, very much alive.

Espino

I read a little bit about him in the Eastside Sun. Not about him, but about some of the issues that were important to him, and it seems like he was really worried about health and tuberculosis and--do you remember following--

Davis

Yes, he worked for the county, the group that was taking X-rays. Yes, that's where he came from when he first ran for city council.

Espino

That was his professional job. That's how he earned a living was working in this facility. Oh, I didn't know that.

Davis

Yes, and this very dear friend of mine, Henrietta Villascusa, was a public health nurse. She was the first Hispanic in Lincoln Heights and around, and I think she worked with Roybal and knew him or something. She also worked for another assemblyman--I don't remember his name--and she worked for George Brown, too. She died just recently, in 2002, I think.

Espino

Do you know what some of the main concerns were about health, some of the important issues?

Davis

Well, I think tuberculosis was very important then. In fact, I had that in my family. One of my father's sisters died of it, and my brother, Jesús, also had it and was in a sanitarium for about four years when he was little. It was a concern to the community because in those days they used to take them away and isolate them and so on. Childcare was very important. I know this friend, Marion Graff, her mother, who was old, much older, she volunteered at the children's clinic and used to help weigh the babies. Also health for the students. I remember having lunches and stuff like that. People were concerned about all those things, and the dentists.

Espino

Do you think that they wanted to establish more clinics, or did they want to make the county hospital more responsive or accessible, or do you remember any specific programs that people were talking about?

Davis

No, I don't remember that we had problems with the county hospital. We had the day clinics that the county used to open and operate. We could always use more of those, because we used to have to travel a ways to get to them. But I don't remember any particular complaint or anything.

Espino

What about dealing with tuberculosis? Were they trying to--I don't know if there was a test available for tuberculosis or--

Davis

Oh yes, there was a skin test. They used to poke you. I remember for years I used to have a little mark, because I used to have to have the test every year because of my aunt and so on. So the test was readily available, and the concern was that they would have to be isolated.

Espino

So they didn't want them to be isolated? They wanted them to be able to stay in their home, or--

Davis

Oh, they couldn't, because it was too contagious.

Espino

That's right. Did they have an education campaign to try to prevent the spread?

Davis

Oh yes.

Espino

Was that part of Roybal's--

Davis

Probably, yes. Yes, that's where he came from. I guess he went to UCLA, too, I think.

Espino

Yes, I'm not familiar with his educational background, but possibly. Was he older than you?

Davis

Oh yes.

Espino

Much older?

Davis

No, not that much older.

Espino

Did you know his wife [Lucille Roybal]?

Davis

Oh yes. Yes, we knew her very well, and her children [Lucille, Lillian and Edward]. I went to see them a couple of years ago when he had already retired from Congress, and both he and his wife were sitting in--each one had a lounging chair, and they were covered up. Lucille was covered up up to her neck with covers, and she had a bad heart, has a bad heart, and I guess she had suffered an attack or something. Roybal was diabetic, and he was having a problem with a leg when I saw him. I think he had a sore or something on that. He passed away a couple of years ago, and I guess Lucille is still living. His daughter, Lucille, has inherited his office in the Roybal Building. She's on the Appropriations Committee and some other ones. She's following in his footsteps, being a very good representative. Her sister, I don't know if she was a social worker or not. I think she was, and their son, [Edward] Roybal, Jr., was a lawyer. I don't know if he's ever married. I know Lucille is married and has children, but I don't know about the other ones.

Espino

Yes, I saw some pictures from an article, and it was some function that Roybal and his wife were at, and they were dressed very elegantly. Then I also read some of the news stories about the events that CSO would have. These weren't just barbecues in the backyard. These were really fancy gala events where people wore black ties. Did you attend any of those type of functions?

Davis

Yes, all the time. Everything was very elegant, yes.

Espino

Was it very formal, in long gowns, and people would--

Davis

No, not really. [Very elegant dresses, not necessarily long.]

Espino

Some of the pictures that I saw, it seemed like that, that they were very fancy.

Davis

I think some of the banquets would be like that.

Espino

Yes, the banquets. Those would be the big fundraisers, I think, that CSO would have.

Davis

Yes. I remember one big event. We were celebrating, I think, the tenth anniversary of CSO, and Roybal was being honored as the first president and so on, because I remember working to make the centerpiece for the tables out of Styrofoam and spraying them with gold paint, and I think it said "Tenth Anniversary" or something. I had a little machine with a saw, and I could cut pieces of Styrofoam that way, so I was able to make either letters or whatever.

Espino

So you did all sorts of different things for the organization, because you were doing citizenship classes, and then you were also helping out cooking and serving every once in a while.

Davis

Serving, and voter registration. I also handled the Fair Election Committee after Roybal's--I was the chairperson.

Espino

Chairperson. Was that unusual, to have a female chairperson of a committee?

Davis

I think we were beginning to evolve in those days. I know as chairman I went to the county--the state's--it was their Fair Elections Committee. They also had it. And I went to the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] with the irregularities. There were ninety-two of them. I was trying to get somebody to investigate them, and they would all say no. The FBI was the only one that the agents that came out and met with us said we had a very good case, and they had to go talk to the attorney general. And he turned us down and said they were not going to do an investigation. The agents were very apologetic, because they were ready to go on it. In fact, they made Xerox copies of the affidavits so that we could put the original affidavits in a safe place, and use the copies whenever we had to show them to people or anything.

Espino

What were the irregularities? This was for one of Roybal's cam--

Davis

Yes. They were in schools, barbershops, and homes. There were people on the sidewalk outside of the polling place telling people that they had to read the Constitution in English or other things; mainly, I remember the Constitution. They were told they couldn't vote because they were Hispanic. There were all different kinds of things. Ballot boxes being taken away instead of waiting for the county registrar to pick them up.

Espino

Wow. And this was just on the Eastside.

Davis

All over around him, Lincoln Heights and everything.

Espino

So it was northeast Los Angeles and East Los Angeles--

Davis

Yes.

Espino

--and even further. Further east?

Davis

I don't remember how far it went, but there were ninety-two separate irregularities.

Espino

But you were never able to do anything.

Davis

No, we never could get anybody to investigate. [John Anson] Ford, although he was supporting Roybal, he was the head of the Fair Elections Committee of the state, and he didn't do an investigation, either. I had people call me later on--[Telephone rings.]

Espino

Just a minute.[Recorder turned off.]

Espino

Okay, it's recording now, Grace, and I'm sorry for my phone ringing, but we're going to stop here, because it's almost three o'clock, and I'm going to go pick up my kids from school. But we'll pick up on the irregularities of the elections during one of Roybal's elections, and we'll move on to when you were working for Brown and probably talk about your work with Bradley next time. Okay?

Davis

Okay.

Espino

Thank you, Grace.[End of interview]

1.5. Session 5 (September 26, 2008)

Espino

This is Virginia Espino, and today is September 26, 2008, and I'm interviewing Grace Montañez Davis at her home in Highland Park, California.

Espino

Okay, Grace, I just want to go back to some of the things that we talked about last time relating particularly to you as a woman and how you experienced them as a woman. You told me that after your marriage, you didn't want to have children right away, so I'm interested in how did you avoid having children. What kind of family planning?

Davis

I used a diaphragm. I wanted to have children, but my husband said that he would feel more secure after he obtained tenure at school, so we waited, I guess, about three years. I was also working at the time, so I didn't have much time to be a housekeeper or anything. So it went along with my feelings and everything.

Espino

Did you talk to your mom [Belen Mendoza Montañez] about this, about birth control?

Davis

No.

Espino

Did she ever give you advice about taking care of yourself?

Davis

Only once, way when I was still in high school. I don't remember what brought it on, but she used a milk bottle with the cap on it to tell me that that's the way women were, and that when you had intercourse, that that seal was broken. But that's all I ever remember her telling me.

Espino

She didn't tell you how to avoid pregnancy?

Davis

No.

Espino

Did she ever talk to you about her philosophy, if she used birth control?

Davis

The only thing I remember, and this was way back when we lived on Avenue 18, was that she was sick in bed, and the doctor from the county hospital [Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center] came to see her, and they would always chase me out of the room. But I just remembered that she was hemorrhaging, and so I just later in life came to the conclusion that she probably had a miscarriage.

Espino

Okay. I mean, you had mentioned that before. So then how did you come to understand the need for birth control before your marriage? Or did that occur after you were married?

Davis

In fact, when I started going with my husband [Ray Davis], he was the one who suggested that I get a diaphragm. I went to some doctor on Wilshire Boulevard. One of the girls at UCLA recommended him, and so I remember getting a diaphragm, so my husband and I did have intercourse before we got married.

Espino

Before you got married. Was that common for women of your generation?

Davis

I think so, yes.

Espino

Most of the women that you knew were not waiting until they got married.

Davis

No, they did, I think, the ones that went to [high] school with me and so on. I think they waited, although I'm not sure about college, because I remember at the prom that there was a lot of drinking.

Espino

Oh, really. In high school.

Davis

No, at college.

Espino

Oh, in the college prom. You had a prom in college.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

When you were at Immaculate Heart. So you think that women were, at that time as well, having intercourse.

Davis

They must have been. I remember they used to leave the ballroom and disappear from some time, and they used to go out on the beach and everything.

Espino

Oh, that's interesting. So you also talked about how your family was very Catholic. How did you reconcile the Catholic doctrine of not using birth control with your practice?

Davis

I stopped going to church, I guess, because I felt that I wasn't going along with their teachings, and so I just kind of felt like a hypocrite, so I didn't go.

Espino

You stopped going to church around the time that you were dating your husband?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Or before that time?

Davis

No, I used to go to church even when I first started to date him, because I remember we used to travel to the missions in California on Saturday, and we used to leave early. I remember going to church. I don't remember--it's a boulevard in front of a country club over in West L.A., and when I got there, I don't remember if it was daylight-saving time, but the church was closed, and I sat on the staircase of the church waiting for it to open. I could see the golfers who come out early in the morning. I could see their lights across the street and so on. But I remember I was still going to church then. It was later in the relationship that I stopped.

Espino

Did you ever talk to your mom about this, about leaving the church for some time?

Davis

No. No.

Espino

Did you go back eventually, start going back to church later in life?

Davis

After my divorce. I don't remember just when, but very later in life, because when I was working as deputy mayor, I still wasn't going to church.

Espino

Do you remember the year that you got divorced? What year did you get a divorce?

Davis

1968.

Espino

And that was still early. You still were young. And you never remarried after that.

Davis

No.

Espino

You also told me that previous to your marriage with Ray Davis, you had a boyfriend that was controversial, more controversial than your non-Catholic marriage.

Davis

Yes. He was a chief petty officer [name unknown] in the navy, and he had just retired from the navy. I met him at some event in South Central that I remember the kids all at UCLA had gone to. I don't remember what it was. I met him there and had danced with him and everything. So we became friends, and I used to go out with him. He gave me a picture in his uniform of chief petty officer. I don't know what possessed me, but I took it. I used to go home on the weekends, and I took it home to show it to my mother. She had a tremendous reaction to it when she found that I was actually going with him. So I thought just she was having a reaction and that was it. I went back to school, and the following week, I think on Monday, I get a call from the priest, the head priest at Our Lady Help of Christians, who said the next time I come into town, he wanted to speak to me. I told him, "Well, I'll go home right now so you can speak to me."

Davis

He said that my mother had been to see him, and so it was after work, and I had a little car that I had bought from one of the fellows there at school, and I drove all the way home. The priests at Our Lady Help of Christians had always been Italian. This was the first Spanish-speaking order we had. I think it was the Corecian Fathers. But they came from Spain, and I don't remember the head priest, but I did go see him. He started to tell me that this was not a proper arrangement for me, because the blacks were a separate tribe, that God had separated them and so on. I really took great exception to it. I even asked him how about St. Augustin? He was black, and St. Martin de Porres was black. He waved it off, and I remember standing there and just telling him, "Thank you very much."

Davis

Our relationship became strained. I still used to go to church then. Later on--well, that same week--he had called my father [Alfredo Viallescua Montañez], and he wanted to talk to him about getting me to break up this relationship. My father just told him that it was his affair to take care of at home and that he shouldn't have interfered. My father told me the next time I went that Father had tried to get him--I don't remember that my friendship with this man had lasted after that. He found someone else or something.

Espino

What was his name? Do you remember his name?

Davis

No.

Espino

That's interesting that your father had a completely different reaction than your mother.

Davis

Yes. And they didn't discriminate against blacks or anything.

Espino

Your parents?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Yes, you told me your mother had a couple of female friends.

Davis

And my father worked with different people and so on. But it was just the idea that--it became very personal to her.

Espino

What exactly did your mother say, do you remember? You said she had a very strong reaction.

Davis

No. She couldn't understand how I could have a relationship with him.

Espino

Was she angry, or was she worried?

Davis

Just worried, yes.

Espino

Was it a relationship that lasted a very long time?

Davis

No, not very.

Espino

And it wasn't the priest's comments that ended it.

Davis

No. No, it was something entirely different. He just found someone else.

Espino

That's interesting. Did you ever date any more African Americans after that?

Davis

No.

Espino

He was the only one?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

So did you find yourself in situations where you were with different ethnic groups, African American, Anglo, Jewish? Was that common during your years in college?

Davis

At UCLA. At Immaculate Heart, no. I only met white girls, and there were some Hispanics, very few. I think there was just another girl in my chemistry class, Bertha Serrano, whose father was a butcher in East L.A., and they had done very well during the war [World War II]. She had two other sisters, and she and a younger sister--I don't remember if her older sister had gone to Immaculate Heart. Her older sister was a dress designer, and I don't remember when she went to school, but she used to design clothes, and in fact, for the prom at Immaculate Heart, she designed my dress. I don't know how much she charged me or what, but it was very beautiful. I remember it was yellow organdy over a slip, and it had flowers underneath that you could see through the material, and it was strapless. I remember we went to Frederick's of Hollywood to buy strapless bras.

Davis

I just remember one prom. There was another event we had around Christmas, because I remember going with one of the girls' brother to one event, and another brother to another event. They were part black. The mother was a very white person, and the father was Negro. I remember that they were very concerned that I not form a permanent relationship with the brothers.

Espino

The sisters or your parents?

Davis

No, the sisters.

Espino

With their own brothers.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Because they were--

Davis

I guess--well, the children were a very fair black, and the mother was white.

Espino

So would you describe that socially and in your work, relationships with African Americans were very common, but interracial coupling or marriage, that was still not something that people were willing to encourage?

Davis

I guess so, yes. Later on in life, during the Poverty Program, the Department of Labor had an office in Los Angeles, and the head [Robert Reynolds] of that office was black. Again, he was a fair black. After the sixties I went to work for him. I remember he came over to the house, and he and my husband filled out my application so that I would be acceptable. There were only three people in that office. He was black. Bruce [Stark], the other man, was white and I was Hispanic.

Espino

That's interesting. It's interesting that you say he was fair, so it was skin color. I mean, even today skin color is really important in certain circles. At that time,

even for Mexicans, do you think skin color played a role in things? Or how did skin color impact your life growing up?

Davis

It was never really a problem for me. The only time, that time when I was going to Immaculate Heart during the summer, I worked for an air-conditioning and heating company, and somebody came in looking for the boss, and I was alone in the office. I used to answer the phone. And the man just came in and was looking for the boss, and I took the message and he left. Well, it seems that he called the boss and said he would not do business with him anymore because he had someone of color working for him. So the boss called Immaculate Heart College and asked that they send him somebody else. I don't know how much he told them, but they didn't say anything to me, but one day in the week another girl from Immaculate Heart showed up and was supposed to be interviewed for the job, and that's how I knew. The boss came in and was confronted by it, so he told me he had to let me go, because he couldn't afford to lose customers.

Espino

Wow. How about any teasing in school with--

Davis

No. I don't ever remember--

Espino

Or your brothers?

Davis

No.

Espino

Nothing. That's good that you didn't have to grow up with that. When I was growing up, I received a lot of teasing, yes, in South Pasadena here. So skin color was so important even in the seventies. I can imagine in the fifties and the forties, people paid attention to that.

Davis

I do remember when I was little, they used to make a lot to do about skin color and your hair. This woman who married my cousin, the one who was the father of my oldest brother, Mary Mendoza, and she took me to the beauty salon one time and had them give me a permanent. Well, I remember her discussing me with the lady as if I wasn't there, that somehow that my hair was coarse or something, and I just got to understand that it had to do with my color or something. But why they had a permanent, I don't know. But that was the lady that I went to all my life, even after I was married.

Espino

To have your hair done.

Davis

To get my hair done, yes.

Espino

Okay, so that's really important, those topics. I want to move now to some gender issues, to some issues that don't reflect necessarily you being Mexican but you being a woman, because that was also something that was really important in the fifties, you know, how women lived their lives. You said that your early work with the CSO [Community Service Organization] was as a hostess, cleaning up, and that's basically what the women did. So I'm interested in what kind of opportunities for women existed so that they could move into leadership roles. Do you remember that?

Davis

Excuse me. I'm going to get a glass of water.

Espino

Okay, I'll pause it.[Recorder turned off.]

Davis

I don't remember that we had any opportunity to do more than help with the food with banquets. We had fundraisers. I think what opened up for women was when we had the voter registration drives. That allowed us then to assume leadership roles in calling registrars and taking them out to places to register and so on. So I think that, getting involved in politics, gave us an

opportunity. The citizenship classes, Alvina Carillo was the head of that, and she used to go to immigration courts to do the swearing in and so on and used to teach people how to teach and have different classes in different locations.

Espino

Was she appointed or did she volunteer, do you remember?

Davis

She just volunteered [and then was appointed].

Espino

In the early days of the CSO did the men just appoint themselves as leaders or presidents, like, for example, Tony Rios or [Edward] Roybal, or was there an election or a committee, or how were leaders--

Davis

They just naturally evolved, because it was assumed that they were the leaders, [but we had an election]. They represented different unions and different organizations. So it just naturally evolves that they captured the leadership.

Espino

And then later on when Roybal was running for supervisor, he had already been an elected official and this was a new election, you became the chairperson of the Fair Elections Committee. And that was within CSO?

Davis

Yes. We had conducted the campaign for Roybal and so on. That was when we were there together with George Brown in his headquarters. Again, we had women heading up headquarters and helping with the campaign, so a lot of women assumed roles of leadership and so on during that. I was very much involved in the Roybal campaign, and, in fact, I was in charge of the headquarters. I was at home during the day with my children, but in the evening when my husband came home, I would leave to go and man the headquarters. So I was very much involved, going in and out, and so on, so that when we all started to talk about the campaign for Roybal and the experience we had at the voter registrar of seeing ballots, boxes, taken away

and not brought to the office for counting, and Roybal being ahead at one point, and then suddenly all these things happened, and he was no longer ahead, and so on. And as we were talking on the phone, just with the immediate group, we thought that it merited a meeting to find out how widespread all this had been.

Davis

So we had a meeting at the Carpenters' Hall on Soto Street near First Street, or near Brooklyn [Cesar E. Chavez Avenue], I guess. We were just amazed that, just by word of mouth, that that place was packed with people who were concerned, because we had made an honest effort to get him elected and didn't succeed.

Espino

So this was the election for him to become supervisor that he lost.

Davis

Right.

Espino

And he lost to Eugene Debs?

Davis

Right.

Espino

So after the election, that's when everybody got together.

Davis

That's when we got together, yes.

Espino

I see.

Davis

So we decided to have this committee, and I was named chairman. I was leading most of the things anyway. As I said, then the ACLU attorneys wrote

up an affidavit form that we could use--it was very simple--in collecting the data, and the people were very interested in going out into the community to the different places that had been polling places. We were amazed when [the community people] came with ninety-two affidavits of people who had been harassed, and then we went to different levels of authority, the county, the state. Ford was on the board there at that time. And they didn't do anything. The Civil Rights Commission also appeared to be very interested, but they didn't do anything.

Davis

At the end, we went to the FBI. They used to be on Shatto Street in the mid-Wilshire area. I remember sitting in the lobby, and two agents came out to talk to us to see what we had. We showed them the affidavits and explained everything that had happened, and they said we had a case and were very excited about continuing with some investigation. They took the affidavits and they went inside to talk to the attorney general. They were gone a while, and when they came back, they were a different mood. You could tell. They didn't know how to tell us, but they said that the attorney general said there would be no investigation. I remember that was Atwaters or something like that.

Davis

So they made copies of the affidavits for us and said that we should put the originals away somewhere safe and use the copies whenever we had to use them. So we came away very disheartened. I had gone there with my comadre [Consuelo Meneses], and she was with me. I decided to have someone to witness. She went with me every time we went to see these people.

Espino

Was she also involved in the CSO?

Davis

Oh yes, very much. She used to do a lot of the cooking. She was very good. She actually cooked.

Espino

What was her name?

Davis

Consuelo Meneses. She and her husband are the godparents of all three of my children, because we decided to look for someone who could really take care of our children, who thought the way we did and were enough associated with religion to at least be able to identify with something. But they weren't practicing, either. So we got this priest in East Los Angeles, Father Coffield. We used to hear about him. At Dolores Mission he was always in the paper, because he used to be at the jail, seeking release of the boys that were being picked up, and many times was not at the church to conduct the masses every day. The bishop used to get after him because he said he spent too much time in jail with these people and so on. So we had knowledge of him and supported him for the work he was doing, so we went to him and asked him if he would baptize our children, and he did.

Espino

So he was a priest who was kind of different than--

Davis

Right. He picketed the cardinal one time, and he got ostracized to Wisconsin.

Espino

From Los Angeles.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

For doing that?

Davis

For doing that. He came back later, years later, because he worked with the migrant workers in Wisconsin. I think that's when he got interested in the migrant workers. So he came back, and I don't remember what parish he was in. Later in life he was in Santa Ana, and that's where he was. He became a monsignor later in life. I think [Cardinal] Manning made him a monsignor, and I remember going to the service where he was inducted. I remember that we

both laughed and said [Cardinal] McIntyre, who was the cardinal that he used to picket, must be turning in his grave that he made monsignor. I later saw him--I forget. He was celebrating some anniversary of his priesthood, and I think his birthday, too, or something, and they had a reception at the--let's see, at the mission [San Juan Capistrano]. But a lot of people came from all over. He was very well known. Father [John] Coffield. He just recently died.

Espino

How would you describe your politics and his politics? How would you describe yourself at that time?

Davis

Very much interested in people who didn't have a voice, who lacked education and who had their rights violated.

Espino

Would you consider yourself militant?

Davis

Oh yes.

Espino

And radical?

Davis

Not radical.

Espino

Not radical.

Davis

No.

Espino

What would radical mean at that time? I mean, how would that differentiate from militant?

Davis

I think radical of someone who disobeyed laws and was contrary to the administration, and I always worked within the administration.

Espino

So you were militant within the administration. And you considered this priest the same, a militant?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

What about your husband?

Davis

Oh, very much. He was the one who encouraged me to reach out and help people.

Espino

And Roybal?

Davis

He was a very good friend. We were all active in CSO and that's where we knew him from. So we just worked. I know my husband, who has a background in journalism, did all of his campaign literature and news releases, so he didn't have to pay someone to do that.

Espino

Wow. But would you describe him as militant, Roybal?

Davis

Yes, but again in a very organized--and within the authority. He never did anything--he would never have a sit-in or anything like that.

Espino

You would view those acts as more radical, sit-ins and demonstrations?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Okay, that's interesting. What kind of leader was Roybal? How would you describe his leadership skills?

Davis

I remember that there was a lot of criticism about him when he was leaving the city council. Although he tried to develop Richard Tafoya [his aide] to take his place, and supported him for running for office, he was criticized for not developing other people, too, and so on. But I think he did do that; he just wasn't very conspicuous a lot.

Espino

Did he develop any women leaders?

Davis

Much later in life. For instance, when Gloria Molina ran, he was very supportive of her.

Espino

That was in the seventies?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

How did he interact with other CSO members or other activists? I mean, what kind of rapport did he have with people?

Davis

Very good. I mean, he was just very friendly with everybody.

Espino

He was well liked?

Davis

Very well liked, yes.

Espino

But you don't remember any other criticisms that people might have had of him?

Davis

Only when he was campaigning, we thought he spent a lot of time on the west side and not enough time on the Eastside. We used to complain to his wife [Lucille Beserra Roybal], who always worked in the campaign headquarters, and we used to call it pillow talk, because she would go home at night and talk to him.

Espino

Oh, that's interesting. I didn't realize that she was also involved in his campaign.

Davis

Very much. Very much, from the very first time. I wasn't around when he ran for council, but people who didn't know her then, she used to work out of her home, and I guess that was their headquarters.

Espino

And she would attend a lot of the functions?

Davis

Oh, everything, yes. She was very active.

Espino

How did people view her?

Davis

The same. We had very much respect for her and liked her, related to her.

Espino

She didn't have an official title.

Davis

No.

Espino

But was she considered a leader, even though she didn't have an official title, or was she considered--

Davis

I think she would, especially because she had access to Roybal, and we could always be sure that our concerns would be voiced to him through her. So that made her a leader.

Espino

Was she well liked by people?

Davis

Very much. Yes, she's still living. A couple of years ago when both Roybal and she were still living--he had retired from Congress--she had a very bad heart condition, and he was diabetic. They had a house in Pasadena, and Marion Graff and Pat Ho and I, Marion Graff, this friend of mine who was also very active in CSO, took us to Pasadena, and we spent an hour or so with them. They were sitting in armchairs, completely covered. I think it was during the winter, but it was a warm day. We weren't even wearing sweaters. But they were completely covered with blankets, and they had a man and a woman who helped them take care of the house and their own needs. So that was the last time I saw them.

Espino

Did you see them socially? Did you have dinner with them, or was it all around political work?

Davis

Well, I think so, because there were always fundraisers and meeting to go to, and if they happened to be there, we would also be there and relate to them and so on.

Espino

That's interesting, because the impression--this was like in the fifties, right?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

The impression of women at that time was that they were homemakers, raising families, and your experience is completely different from that.

Davis

Yes, well, I think most of the women were there with their husbands and so on. Alvina Carillo was a single woman. Henrietta Villaescusa, the public health nurse, was also involved all the way; in fact, went to Washington and worked for George Brown. I don't know if she ever worked for Roybal, but she used to relate to him very well all the time.

Espino

Was she a single woman?

Davis

Yes, she was. Alvina Carillo married a member of CSO, Eliseo Carillo, and I remember that she was older than he was, and there was a lot of speculation about that. But they made a go of it, because she, I think, had Alzheimer disease, and Eliseo used to take her to the MAPA [Mexican American Political Association] meetings we had for endorsing local candidates and so on. She would just sit there and not interact or anything, but he used to take her then. She passed away, and then he was still--I saw him when Henrietta Villaescusa passed away, I think in 2003.

Davis

I went with Pat Ho again and Marion Graff. Pat Ho lives in Mount Washington, and she took Marion and I to Henrietta's funeral. Pat Ho was helping me across the bumpy, grassy area of the cemetery, and Eliseo came from behind us and said, "Let me help you," and he took over helping me get to the place where Henrietta was being buried. That was the last time I saw him. He had

been an engineer with the city and had worked for the Department of [Public Works] for many years.

Davis

I found out about his death. I read the El Pueblo, the city employees' newspaper, and I never read the obituaries, but that day I decided to read them, and I found his name. He had just passed away. Marion had just called them, and she said he didn't feel like talking or anything, so he was probably sick then.

Espino

So was it unusual to have women, single women, participating?

Davis

No, they were perfectly accepted. I'm sure there were others. I just don't remember, because the garment industry was very well represented by Jewish people and Mexican women who actually did the sewing. Most of the Jewish had positions as cutters or supervisors.

Espino

So basically everybody who wanted to work was welcome.

Davis

Everybody.

Espino

Eventually, once the election campaigns started, positions opened up, do you think because of the need or--

Davis

I think so, yes. People who weren't working and who had time to volunteer.

Espino

Do you think that women and men were looked at differently in the sense that women had certain qualities and men had other qualities?

Davis

Yes. There was no conscious thing. I guess it just evolved that this was the way things were done.

Espino

People didn't really think about it.

Davis

No. I mean, we didn't think we were being discriminated or anything. Julian Nava was also a member of CSO, and we worked very hard for his campaigns, and follow-up, too.

Espino

And women also took leadership positions--

Davis

Yes.

Espino

--in his campaign? So then I guess we can move on to some of the work that you did after CSO and your position with George Brown. Do you want to talk about that, what the title was and what your responsibilities were?

Davis

Yes. This came about because I used to supervise his headquarters that we shared with Roybal, and I guess he saw that I had the ability to coordinate all the activities and all the volunteers. So when he got elected, he asked me if I would work for him and handle the casework that he got. That was people who called about federal agencies, Social Security, veterans, health, immigration, and so on. People used to call him and I used to answer the phone. He put a phone in my house and a desk and a chair, so that I would have a place to work. I had my two children still, or three children by then, still at home, and so it was very easy for me to do it at home. I used to go in to his office occasionally; I don't know if it was once a week. My mother would take care of my children for me, and I would go in to the office just to get a feel for the different activities that went on and so on.

Davis

I know he had other people working for him. This one person, his name was Phillip DePoint, and he worked for George Brown. Later when Bradley was elected, he worked also for the campaign, and then Bradley hired him to work for him, also. He was his appointment secretary, and I knew him from George Brown's days.

Davis

When I worked for George Brown, when I used to go to the office, I would go to different meetings to represent George Brown's office. I remember one meeting. This was with Social Security. I still know the man, Joe Ortega, who was working for Social Security. They had a program where they went into the high schools and gave the student--they were mostly girls, I guess--who were taking typing and, I don't remember, shorthand, too, but they would give the girls a typing test. They mostly passed, and they would hire them for the Social Security office. They used to go around to different schools. Well, Joe approached Roosevelt High School, and the counselor there told him that they didn't have anybody who would qualify.

Davis

Joe said, "Well, let me try." They wouldn't, so he called me and said he was really anxious to get into Roosevelt. So he set up a meeting with the principal and the counselor, and he had me attend it, representing George Brown. Well, that did it. It worked. He was able to give the test after we talked to the principal. The counselor was adamant about not having qualified people. But he did it, and he found many people.

Davis

When the poverty programs [War on Poverty] came, I used to go to the schools or wherever they had meetings to see that they were developing the programs, and I was representing George Brown again. That's how I met Mr. [Robert] Reynolds, who was the head of the Department of Labor here in Los Angeles. The big program he had was the Neighborhood Youth Program, and he was working to implement that. I used to sit in the meetings to learn about that. That's how he got to hire me when he said they had an opening and he wanted to hire a Hispanic. So he and my husband filled out the application, the federal application.

Espino

So can you just remind me what years did you work for George Brown?

Davis

I don't remember. When did Roybal run for--

Espino

'58? Supervisor? '58.

Davis

'58. Well, I started late in '58 and was still working for him in the sixties.

Espino

So the poverty programs were implemented about 1964, so you were still with George Brown in 1964.

Davis

Maybe not. I'm not sure, because then I went to work for Labor. We were in charge of all of southern California, and anything from San Luis Obispo south to the border was our responsibility. I had Los Angeles. I had the county, schools, San Bernardino, and Riverside, and Santa Ana.

Espino

When you worked for the Labor Department.

Davis

Yes. I used to go meet with the superintendent of schools or principals. We had a in-school program, and we had an out-of-school program. So we also worked with community organizations, who ran the out-of-school program for kids, students who were not in school. Through this program we hoped to get them back into school.

Espino

What was your official title?

Davis

They changed our title about three different times. They also changed the name of the state employment office. I know it used to be the Unemployment Office, and they changed it to--I think finally they came up with what they have now. I don't remember. We used to have the directors of the programs come in to the office for training, and we used to go out.

Davis

At one time I had San Diego, and I visited a lot of the Indian reservations. I had them as contractors. They were a real problem. If they didn't think they had to discuss something with you, they just clammed up. Like a couple of times when I met with the Indian tribe that was handling the city center, the man who was the director, Tony, was talking about his experience about when it opened, and he said that it was open to all, all Indians except Mexicans. I tried to get him to explain, and he just clammed up.

Davis

I had the same experience in Imperial Valley. They had a map of the reservation showing where the tribes lived and so on, and on it they said, "Mexicans lived here," or something. But they said something negative about the Mexicans, because I asked them why, and they clammed up. They wouldn't talk to me about it.

Espino

So in your experience with the Labor Department, you had intense relationships with the American Indian tribes.

Davis

I had a very good relationship with them. When they had a funding for a particular program--let's see. I don't remember the name of the program, but there was funding for a particular program, and we gave the money to the counties and the school district. I was in San Diego at that time, and I got it into my head that we would not award the money to the counties unless they put some aside for the Indians, and this is what I told them. Then I got on the phone and called my director and told him what I had done, and he approved it. So it became a real issue. I remember I used to stay overnight, because they had meetings of the supervisors at night, and we had a discussion, and I had to

be there. They went along with it, but not as much money. I had told them--I think they got something like five million, and that one million should be set aside for Indian. They didn't do that. There was around seventy thousand or eight thousand for the city and a hundred thousand for the county tribes. But at least we got them to get some money.

Espino

And this money was generated from the War on Poverty programs?

Davis

Right. It was all part of that.

Espino

Was somebody writing grants for these?

Davis

Oh yes.

Espino

Who was doing that?

Davis

We wrote grants here in Los Angeles and funded them from here.

Espino

You participated in the grant writing for this money?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

And then you also did the distribution of which programs would benefit?

Davis

Yes. Yes. Dionicio Morales, when he got funded for the New Careers Program, that was a program when people were slotted into a position that would, with the training, elevate them into another position. I don't remember his name,

but there was a person who worked for the county who was really brilliant about developing positions at the county hospital. Therapists, the way they were before, if you became a lung therapist, you could only move in that position. He got it so they all took basic training and then could move into various therapy positions, with the lungs, physical therapy, and other things, drug abuse. He later died. In a restaurant he choked on the food that he was eating.

Espino

Who was this? Who was this that died?

Davis

[unclear] Los Angeles. It was on a weekend when he was out with his friends or something.

Espino

Who is this that you're talking about? I didn't catch it.

Davis

The man who worked for the county who ran the New Careers Program.

Espino

Oh, you don't remember his name?

Davis

No. Dionicio got a grant for that, and that was when the director, the national director of the Department of Labor came out.

Espino

From Washington.

Davis

Yes. Battle was his last name. I don't remember his first name, if it was Michael or something [Mark].

Espino

So then you were recruited away from George Brown by the Labor Department?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

You would have kept working for George Brown if--

Davis

Oh, boy. Yes. But the poverty programs opened up a tremendous amount of opportunities.

Espino

Do you think that they opened up opportunities across the board or for people who were already active, like yourself, with a lot of experience in community activism?

Davis

I think a lot of those people immediately had leadership roles and so on. But it also opened up the door for many other people.

Espino

So, for example, you were talking about the money that went to the American Indian reservation. What do you think happened with that money? Do you think it was put to good use?

Davis

Oh yes, very much so. That's why I went to the individual reservations to see. They built youth centers, medical centers, community centers. They brought water to the reservation--they didn't have it--electricity. They hired people to run the program and so on. So there was a lot of good came out of it.

Espino

What about in East Los Angeles? Do you have any examples of different programs that emerged?

Davis

TELACU [The East Los Angeles Community Union] and the Watts Labor Community Action Committee were both programs for kids, and they were community unions from labor that were empowered to run programs. Both of them are still in existence and doing very well. TELACU has a tremendous-- they do senior housing, [a restaurant] and all different kinds of programs.

Espino

And that was born out of the War on Poverty. Did you administer that, that grant?

Davis

I was assigned for a while, yes, to both of them. I got more involved with the one in Watts. I remember meeting Mr. [Ted] Watkins. He always wore a jumpsuit, and I remember when we met with my boss and were discussing different things, Mr. Watkins didn't say anything. But later on he became very vocal, and he used to go to Washington and so on. He developed a senior center, a peoples' center, all kinds of things. I remember when he passed away, they had a procession of the people through Watts to the center, honoring him and so on. He had a center in Saugus that used to be a county jail, and he converted it where he used to take children, young people, to live up there, and they had dormitories and stuff. They used to work, and they had a farm and animals and so on. I went when the director, the national director of the Department of Labor, came out to look at these programs. I remember going and taking my children with me. Dionicio Morales went on that trip, too. He always used to tease me because he liked the way my children talked to me. He knew Mark--oh, his name was Mark [Battle]. He knew him, and I guess that was the reason he went along, too.

Espino

That's interesting.

Davis

Yes. I used to have a government car, so I used to take everybody up.

Espino

Who took care of your kids during this time?

Davis

Well, I think I had a housekeeper by then. I had someone who stayed here at home.

Espino

Who lived with you?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

That makes it a lot easier, doesn't it? [Laughs]

Davis

Oh yes.

Espino

Yes. So your husband was very supportive then of your involvement.

Davis

Oh yes, very much.

Espino

That wasn't the conflict. And did your marriage, the fact that you worked--

Davis

No. No, he got involved with my housekeeper.

Espino

In a relationship?

Davis

Yes. Yes. So somehow I remember working for Labor then, and I wanted to find out--I thought he had a relationship with a teacher, because he was teaching at Nightingale, and so I borrowed this other woman who worked for

Labor, I borrowed her car. She had a Volkswagen. And I went and parked near Nightingale in one of the side streets where I knew he parked his car, and I sat there, because he had told me he was going someplace or something. So I waited to see if somebody got in the car with him, but he just got in by himself and then took off, and I followed him--I don't know, Rosemead or someplace like that. Then he stopped at a bus stop, and then I saw this woman getting up and getting on the--he had a van, a Volkswagen van, and then I still followed them. Then I lost them somewhere, and I was riding through an alley, and I almost had a head-on collision with them. I remember that we stopped, and then I saw that it was my housekeeper, who had taken some time off from me. I don't remember what reason she gave me; I think she was working someplace.

Davis

So I told her to get out, and both of them were very meek and what have you. I talked to her and told her what she was doing and everything. She and her family moved away and didn't tell him where they were moving, but he found out somehow. They had opened up a restaurant, and he found through--with the permits that the government--where the permits are--and he found her. So we tried counseling, but that didn't get anywhere. I tried going to my doctor. I had him [my husband] come in and have an appointment with him. All of them told me that it was a no-vote from him and that I should just let him go.

Espino

Do you think that incident, you mentioned something about he was let go from the registrar's because of a complaint that a woman--do you think that was true, that he was?

Davis

No, I don't think so. Before this housekeeper, I had another young, very young girl who was an excellent seamstress. I know she made an outfit for me one time and used to do all kinds of things. She suddenly had to leave to go with her mother because--I forget, something that they were trying to bring somebody else in, and they were young and couldn't go to school yet, so she had to be there to take care of them. She was supposed to do this for a

month, and then she called me, but she would never tell me why she had to leave, really, and I suspect now that it had something to do with my husband probably.

Espino

Oh. She was like under eighteen?

Davis

No, she was just about eighteen.

Espino

Wow. And this other woman, the second?

Davis

This other woman, she was a little older, but she still--yes, much younger than he. I immigrated her and her mother. When I called Immigration, they told me this happens all the time.

Espino

Wow. And that ended your marriage.

Davis

Yes. Fourteen years.

Espino

Wow. It's hard to talk about other things after something like that, right? I'm really sorry that that happened. But I guess it's not that uncommon.

Davis

No, and we [my husband and I] are very good friends. He always came on the weekends and took the kids. He did this until they were eighteen and so on. He always gave me money. It wasn't very much. I don't know what I was supposed to do with it, but it helped. Then when he moved, he and his wife adopted a boy, and he and my children are very good friends. They treat him like a brother, and he treats me like a mother, too. He lives in Mexico, and their father lives in Mexico. But every Christmas he comes up and spends it with them. They used to come and visit his wife's sister, who lived in

Alhambra. She just passed away this year, she and her husband, so I don't know if they'll be coming anymore or what. But he used to spend all day Christmas with the children [even now].

Espino

So you kept a cordial relationship with him afterwards.

Davis

Oh yes. Yes.

Espino

It sounds like while you were married, he was very supportive of your professional and your community involvement.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

And that's not all that common, I would imagine, at that time.

Davis

No. He was a firm believer that if you were educated, you have to give to the community.

Espino

Where do you think he developed that idea from?

Davis

I don't know. He's from Michigan, and he lived in New York for a long time, too. He was just very much aware of the community.

Espino

Do you think that in some of your other friends, some of your other female friends, that they had problems with their husbands supporting their work?

Davis

There are two other women in East L.A., and they used to call the three of us something about "the Holy Terrors" or something. They were just as active in their own way. Geri [Zapata] was the head of a community youth organization for years, and Lilia [Aceves] was also very active, and she worked in some of the programs. I don't remember what. But we're still friends. Both of them also were divorced.

Davis

In fact, one time the three of us had been invited by UCLA to come and participate in a program where community people met with black leaders or--I don't remember if there were any Hispanics or anything. But these were black leaders, and the three of us went out of town, I think to Santa Barbara, and met Louie Lomax, who was a television anchorman or something. We were very active within the groups, and we were so enchanted by this man that we asked him would he come to the Eastside and meet with people. We planned the event, I think at Lilia's house, and then we invited men and women. When Louie Lomax got there, he went and hugged us, and their husbands had a fit. My husband said he had to hold them back. They were all in the kitchen or something. Then when he started to talk or something, they would react to things he was saying to them, because he felt he knew us very well and was addressing the group and would say things to us. My husband didn't mind, but theirs did. That was not the reason they got divorced, but they ended up in divorce, too.

Espino

So the husbands were jealous of this man hugging their wives.

Davis

There were other men, too, who were reacting to him that he was coming on to us or something, because there was a very liberal lawyer, Frank Muñoz, and his wife, Connie Muñoz, who is now a lawyer, also. He died of cancer. But he was at the meeting, and he had a reaction, too. I was real surprised that he would have a reaction, because he was such a liberal person.

Espino

Do you think it was because he was African American?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

That's the only reason?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Or was he more friendly than was common?

Davis

We had this--

Espino

Rapport?

Davis

--relationship of having experienced the other project thing, and so we knew each other, so he was just addressing us and so on.

Espino

As close friends, as people that he knew. That's interesting.

Davis

He and another guy, Frank--I don't remember his name, either, but he was a social worker, and he had a reaction, too. We couldn't get over it.

Espino

That's interesting. Is this Lilia Aceves?

Davis

Aceves, yes.

Espino

She's the one who you're mentioning, and then Geri--

Davis

Geri Zapata.

Espino

Geri Zapata.

Davis

Yes. They just a couple of months ago came and picked me up, and we went to see Joe Sanchez, this very active CSO-er and MAPA man who has lost the ability to stand up and walk. He was completely crippled and can only sit, and we went to see him. So they're still active. They meet with people that they used to work with. They were very active with their children who went to a special school on the Eastside. It was a public school, but it was one of those learning centers or something where the parents had a lot to do with it, and they still meet with the parents.

Espino

Lilia is a bit younger than you, isn't she?

Davis

Seventy-seven or something.

Espino

Okay, so not a lot.

Davis

She's not that much.

Espino

And Geri?

Davis

I don't know how old she is.

Espino

Is she about your age?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Your generation.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

And they were involved in--you said you were considered the Holy Terrors.

Davis

Terrors, yes, that's the thing they used to call us, because we were very outspoken and so on.

Espino

Were you a part of the same organization?

Davis

We all belonged to CSO and MAPA.

Espino

Lilia Aceves was also involved in CSO?

Davis

I don't really remember her that long. I think more in MAPA.

Espino

So I think this is a good place to stop. I'd like to talk about MAPA next time and also a little bit about the Chicano movement and Chicano feminism, and then there's still so much more to talk about, the JFK elections and then LBJ, and then move on to Bradley. But there's just so much more to look at in the sixties.

Davis

Have you got that book by that teachers' leader or something?

Espino

No, I don't think so, but I'm going to turn off the tape right now and we'll talk about that.

Davis

Okay.[End of interview]

1.6. Session 6 (October 1, 2008)

Espino

This is Virginia Espino, and today is October 1, 2008. I'm interviewing Grace Montañez Davis at her home in Highland Park, California.

Espino

Okay, Grace, we're going to talk about the sixties today. We talked a little bit about that last time, but I wanted to ask you about the creation of the organization MAPA, the Mexican American Political Association. Were you involved in the beginning?

Davis

Oh, from the very beginning. That was another group that [Edward] Roybal was instrumental in organizing. There was a meeting, I think in Fresno again, with J. J. Rodriguez and some other labor workers, and they established it. Then when we came back to Los Angeles, we started having meetings and things, I remember. I don't remember the struggling days or anything, but I do remember that the group was very much involved in voter registration, too, and the actual candidates would come to MAPA for endorsements, and we would have meetings in which--assemblies, really--in which we had the different candidates for different offices come and speak to us. We generally weren't very friendly to people who didn't come and ask for our endorsement, but it was really something. MAPA didn't really do much for people that we endorsed, but it meant something to be able to say, "We were endorsed by the Mexican American."

Espino

Can you tell me why there was a need for that organization when CSO [Community Service Organization] already existed and was doing some of the same work?

Davis

Well, CSO didn't really get involved in political things. We did voter registration and get out the vote and stuff, but like MAPA, the endorsing of candidates and getting to officers of political people and asking for things and getting their support on things. In other words, we wanted to really just focus on politics, and that's why we had decided on this extra [organization].

Espino

Were you still with CSO, because MAPA was founded in 1960. Were you still working in both CSO and MAPA?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

So do you remember how often you would go to meetings?

Davis

Not really.

Espino

Every week? Every night were you away?

Davis

No, not that often. MAPA meetings generally had to do with endorsing assemblies, or if there was an issue that we were supporting, we would have meetings and explain it to the people and so on. But mainly we focused on getting out the vote and voter registration and then supporting candidates.

Espino

So, for example, if there was a police brutality issue, would that be something that MAPA did not look at?

Davis

They did, but that was more a CSO issue. They dealt more in community things.

Espino

So it was mainly--

Davis

Sidewalks and getting streets paved and things, school issues. Because I know--well, for instance, when Julian Nava, who was the first Mexican to run, and I think they ran citywide at that time, so we had to sell him to the whole community and all, but he managed to get elected.

Espino

That was through MAPA or through CSO?

Davis

No, through CSO, I think. Later he became an issue for MAPA, too, because I think later on they had elections; they split the district into smaller districts, and you only had to run within the district that you were going to represent.

Espino

Do you remember some of the first candidates that you endorsed through MAPA?

Davis

Mainly at that time, too, people were starting to come out and run for office, so besides Roybal, who was already in office, we had other candidates. And then MAPA groups sprung up all over the state. They were very strong up in the north, and I remember endorsing assemblies up there with the people in Fresno and Sacramento. Also Santa Ana, San Bernardino, San Diego's, we started. We started chapters all over.

Espino

Would you have a general meeting with all of these different contingents?

Davis

Not really. Once in a while we would, maybe annually or something, and invite people from different areas to come, and we would have an endorsement with more people and so on. I mainly remember--and this wasn't in the sixties; I know it was way different--but supervisors in Orange County, Congresswoman--this Loretta Sanchez, who has been quoted in the paper, and now her sister [Linda T. Sanchez]. I forget her name, but she also has run for Congress and gotten elected from Orange County, different district. San Diego also has had people running down there for city council, I know.

Espino

And these communities were organized even back in the sixties, because they were developing out of a MAPA organization.

Davis

Well, they probably came later; I know the Los Angeles one. Maybe the late sixties we started to spring up.

Espino

Do you know where the idea came from to form that? Were you part of that discussion?

Davis

No, just Roybal and some people just got together. Eduardo Quevedo was also a part of it, and Bert Corona. They became a part of MAPA.

Espino

Yes, I remember that they were--Roybal was the first president.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Do you think that the African American Civil Rights movement in the South had any influence on how organized Mexican Americans in East Los Angeles were?

Davis

I'm sure it had some effect. They saw the getting together of people and speaking up, that it had results, and so the Mexican Americans also began to get together and speak out.

Espino

Because it seems like Roybal was very active in the forties, so that was even before some of the Civil Rights acts.

Davis

Yes. I know he had access to the community because he worked for the county and was a public health educator.

Espino

Yes, and then Dionicio Morales was also, in his own way, trying to work for the improvement of the Mexican community back in the forties. So I'm just wondering how influential do you think that the African American community rising up in the South and protesting segregation and things like that were, or was it already part of what people were doing?

Davis

There were things also happening not in California, but, for instance, in New Mexico. [Reyes] Tijerina was an activist, and I know he took over--I don't remember what exactly, but I remember he took over the control of either a courthouse [Tierra Armarilla Courthouse, 1967] or something. And again, when he ran--I know he ran away so he wouldn't get arrested, and he came here to California--he was hosted by different groups, communities and so on.

Espino

I think that was in the sixties, but I'm not sure, the actual date, but I'll find out.

Davis

Yes. I know that sometime, when President Johnson, he had--again because there was a lot of pressure from the Hispanics about getting recognized and an equal share--so he had a conference for the Mexican Americans [Cabinet Committee Hearings on Mexican Affairs, 1967] in El Paso. He had all the heads of his departments to come to that meeting and head up the workshops, and they were very careful. It was a very strictly run conference. You had to go

there only by invitation, and they would issue you credentials from Washington. I think we lucked out and were able to participate because--I don't know how Manuel Aragon, who later became deputy to Tom Bradley, he was in Washington and was assigned the job of--I'm sure there were other people working, too--but he was also to recruit people and then certify people who could attend the conference. Because I know I was with Labor then, too, but it was again early in the sixties. The Department of Labor decided that someone more senior than I was should represent the Department of Labor. But I went anyway on my own. Manuel gave me the credentials that I needed. I think I still have it, though, a button, a plastic button with the name of the conference, and ribbons, yellow and red ribbons.

Espino

Do you still have that?

Davis

I think I do.

Espino

I would like to see that just to get a sense of what the name of that conference was.

Davis

With that conference, one of the reasons for the high security was because Tijerina had just had his uprising in New Mexico, and so they didn't invite him to the conference, but he was there in town anyway and was staying in one of the hotels. Another person who was there giving us council was Ernesto Galarza. I don't know if he didn't get credentials, either. I don't see why not, though. But he was in a hotel in the lobby, I remember, and we would be in the workshop, and whatever the authorities told us and so on, we would run to him and tell him what was going on, and then he would counsel us of what to get back to and so on. But I remember walking down the block, way down the block, to go see him.

Espino

Wow. Why would they not give him credentials?

Davis

I don't know if he didn't have credentials. I don't remember.

Espino

Do you remember being upset that he wasn't participating?

Davis

No, we just used him as a counsel to us and all. I know also the one of the big decisions that--they said Johnson was going to come down the streets like a procession and so on, and we decided that he was going to use us to show that there was a great support for him in the Mexican community, and so we boycotted. There were a lot of us who stayed behind. There were some of the people who went out in the street to see it. The car went by so fast you couldn't see who was in there. So we didn't go out, but that was again something that Ernesto Galarza gave us counsel.

Espino

To do the boycott.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

That seems like that was a new strategy, boycotting. That was something that you hadn't done before with the CSO.

Davis

No, that's right. I guess that was about the time that César Chávez started his boycotts of the grapes and things.

Espino

How did you feel about those new tactics?

Davis

Well, they were having an effect, and that was good.

Espino

It didn't bother you that you were doing something a little bit more radical?

Davis

No.

Espino

Did you have an opinion of--it was Reyes Tijerina. Did you have an opinion about his activities?

Davis

No, I figured he had had enough of the rejection and not being recognized and given rights, and so he was standing up for his rights.

Espino

So you didn't think that he was--

Davis

Radical?

Espino

--or crazy or--

Davis

No.

Espino

Do you think his tactics were effective?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

So they were working. So you would support him?

Davis

I would have. Whenever we had activity to support him in, I would participate.

Espino

It seems that there were those kinds of politics, like Reyes Tijerina in the Mexican community, Mexican American community, and also in the African American community, because you had Martin Luther King [Jr.], who had a completely different strategy than Malcolm X. Do you remember having any experience with either one of those leaders or their supporters?

Davis

Only that we supported Martin Luther King. I don't remember that we supported Malcolm X. I think we thought he was a little bit too radical or too-- Martin Luther King objected to things and stood up for them but in a peaceful way.

Espino

That was something that you were more comfortable with, that style?

Davis

Right.

Espino

Because I could imagine Martin Luther King at a meeting like this that you're talking about, where you have Johnson and his heads of departments, and it's all within the institution of the United States government. It wasn't something that challenged as Reyes Tijerina did, right, taking over a building. It was a whole different strategy. Did you remember some of the gains of that meeting? What did you achieve from that?

Davis

I remember I participated in the Health and Welfare meetings. The head of that at the time, I can't think of his name, if it was Joe somebody. I don't remember if that was at that time or later. But we had rapport with them, and we were able to achieve some positive things that they were going to do. I don't remember what they do; I just remember there was a very positive thing.

Davis

In the Labor workshop there was a lot of discord because we used to object to not having enough jobs and training and things. I think the highlights of that

was Dionicio Morales was there, and he challenged Johnson to be more positive about dealing with the Mexican community. I remember Johnson challenged him. He said did he have a proposal for something that the Labor [Department] could react to, and Dionicio Morales said, "Yes," and he took it out [a proposal]. I remember that Johnson reacted positively to it and invited him to come to Washington with this proposal so that they could work something out to fund it. I remember that I came back then to Los Angeles, and I told my boss about that, and sure enough, the Washington people then worked with the regional people in San Francisco, and then they came to us then, and we were then the responsible person for it. They did the funding, but we did the actual enacting of the proposal, and that started up a very warm relationship with him.

Davis

We had had a relationship with TELACU [The East Los Angeles Community Union], and Ted Watkins. Both of them were Labor-backed projects and so on, but we never got that close to TELACU, so we really welcomed having Dionicio. I don't remember what he got funded for.

Espino

Dionicio?

Davis

Yes. I don't remember under which program he got funded.

Espino

I think it was something to do with jobs and job placement and job training.

Davis

I don't remember what. I know later we funded him for New Careers proposal, which had to do with job training, but slotting people into very specific paths for them to be elevated through and achieve a level of competency. For that occasion I remember he had moved from 1st Street to Brooklyn Avenue, and we were going to celebrate the funding. I remember he invited the head of the poverty programs in Labor in Washington, Mark Battle, to come to see the organization and the things that they were doing, and he came. He was a black

man, but they formed a very good relationship. I know when Dionicio used to go to Washington, he always stopped to see him.

Espino

Mark Battle.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Can you remember some of the names of the other projects that you funded? So that was called New Careers. Do you remember some of the other--

Davis

The main program was the Neighborhood Youth Opportunities or the Neighborhood Youth Group [Neighborhood Youth Corps]. We had an in-school component and an out-of-school component. The school districts ran the in-school project, so that meant the county schools and the city schools. The out-of-school component was run by community groups. People like Ted Watkins had a big out-of-school program. But church groups, community groups, we funded all kinds of groups. With the counties there were three of us in Labor, Bruce [Stark] and Bob Reynolds, who was the director, and we divided--there were ten counties in southern California, and we split them up among the three of us, or among the three of us. I at different times had Los Angeles schools and out-of-school. Then I had San Bernardino and Riverside counties. Another time I had Imperial Valley and San Diego, and that's how I got to know the Indians.

Davis

But I remember when we first were going to Orange County, because we had to fund the schools and negotiate contracts with the school districts and the community groups, but particularly the school district. In fact, they used to proclaim that they didn't have poor people in their county, and that they shouldn't be funded for poverty. These were poverty programs. So my boss, Bob Reynolds, would go with me to go meet them for the first time when we would meet the superintendent of schools, because they were very hard-nosed and would take the minimum of funding.

Espino

And you wanted to give them more.

Davis

Well, we had lots of funding. I remember--was it New Careers? There was another program that it was similar to, and I remember we got this big windfall of money, and we were giving counties like a million dollars. And I remember going to the council meetings at night in San Diego, and their telling me that they don't have poverty. But then I remember I told them that this was an out-of-school program, this big program. I can't think of the name of it. But that was when I told them that they couldn't get funding unless they set aside a certain amount I had imposed on them. They were getting something like ten million dollars, and so I told them a million for the Indians and a million dollars for the city Indians. I got a hundred thousand for the city Indians. They established an Indian Center where they would service the city Indians with jobs and social services and things. Then the other money that they had, they funded the tribes, and they took more money. I don't remember if it was--I think probably around a million dollars. Because we had something like nine or nineteen tribes or reservations, and the funding was very effective there.

Davis

I remember they built youth centers, community centers, brought in water to one reservation, established a clinic for another reservation, got jobs for them. In Imperial County, for instance, the reservation there had established a museum. They had the whole fort that used to be there in the old days of the cavalry, and the Indians took it over and they had a museum and provided all kinds of services to their communities.

Espino

Did this money come from the Office of Economic Opportunity [OEO]?

Davis

No, the Labor had its own money.

Espino

Had its own separate--

Davis

Yes. Yes, THE EYOA [Economic and Youth Opportunities Agency] with the poverty aid councils, they received money from the Equal Opportunity.

Espino

So the money that you were providing through grants didn't come from OEO.

Davis

No, it came from Labor.

Espino

It came from the whole separate Department of Labor. Later on they merged, didn't they, the Department of Labor and the Health and Welfare?

Davis

No. No.

Espino

They never did. They always stayed separate. And Bob Reynolds was your supervisor here in Los Angeles.

Davis

Yes. He was the director of the office.

Espino

What was it like working for him?

Davis

It was great. I had met him when I was working for George Brown, because that was during the time of the development of the poverty legislation, and they used to have meetings in the community to discuss different aspects of the legislation, and he was there. He was with Labor and was laying the groundwork for the funding of the different programs that would come, so he was at most of these meetings that I would attend for George Brown. Then later I went to work for the EYOA and I had all of the county schools. I used to

go to meetings in the county offices that they had downtown, and usually they had the superintendents of the various counties at these meetings, and they would be discussing the program and whatever problems they might have with it and so on.

Davis

But I also had to go out to the county's [schools], different county's [schools], and it was kind of hard. I remember I had a Volkswagen van, and I used to drive it on the freeways and everywhere like that. But mainly I would meet them in the county offices.

Espino

So this was before you worked with the Department of Labor.

Davis

Yes. I don't remember. George Brown was my first job, but this was really a full-time job.

Espino

How long were you with--was it a specific office just focused on distributing money through the EYOC [EYOA] program?

Davis

Oh yes. There was a council in each of the counties [city areas], and the one here dealt with the community organizations. The Equal Opportunity Commission, I guess it was, had their own money and their own programs. They had a council that did all the funding, the reading of proposals, identifying those that should be funded and so on, according to the regulations. There was a lot of fights about how many representatives the community had, and there was a lot of friction with the Mexican Americans and the blacks contending. They always were looking out to make sure they got equal funding, I think.

Espino

So just to clarify that was with the Economic and Youth Opportunity Agency, the EYOA. So you remember some of that infighting, the tension--

Davis

Oh yes.

Espino

--between the African American community and the Mexican American community.

Davis

Yes, and it was at the level of the EYOA, the council that they had.

Espino

So the council had about how many members, do you remember?

Davis

Oh, maybe thirty or something like that. It was a lot.

Espino

That's a big number. Was it diverse?

Davis

Oh yes.

Espino

With Asian Americans as well?

Davis

Asian Americans. I don't think at that time we had that much representation. If they were represented, it was by one or two people.

Espino

Were there other Mexican Americans?

Davis

The Indians, too, American Indians.

Espino

And you would meet here in Los Angeles.

Davis

Yes. They met downtown.

Espino

Who would run those meetings?

Davis

Oh, Joe, Joe Maldonado. He was the head of the EYOA, the director of the whole thing, and he ran the meetings.

Espino

With all these different constituents.

Davis

Yes, they met every week, I think.

Espino

So that was separate from your actual job?

Davis

No, I was working for EYOA. Then I was assigned to the funding that they had for neighborhood youth programs. I was on the in-school part for the county schools.

Espino

And other people had other assignments.

Davis

I don't remember who had the city schools. Then there were the other programs under the Poverty Program, and they each had different monitors and so on.

Espino

Do you remember anything that stands out, maybe something where you all worked together to achieve a goal, or where there was conflict?

Davis

I think we always eventually got over our differences. I remember we used to get special funding for the summer. It was mainly out-of-school youth, I guess, and we would go to other agencies in the city. It couldn't be corporations or anything like that, but other agencies in the city, nonprofit and so on. We had to develop jobs. There was one specific person, Jane Dawson. She was in charge of the summer youth program, and she developed programs of employment for the young people. Again, we had problems with some of the agencies, and we had to twist arms. There were a lot of the federal agencies, especially like the shipyards, they would have problems with the way the kids dressed or if they wore a collar or their hair in an Afro.

Davis

I remember--I guess this was when I was in Labor then--I used to help out with the development of the summer program, and we'd go visit shipyards and different people, trying to get them to develop a position and supervision for the kids to have jobs during the summer and so on. But I think we finally converted them, because even later in life I used to get very positive reports from these agencies about the good that the kids did and the good that the agency did in return by changing their attitudes.

Espino

So, for example, in the shipyard you were working with young men who were trying to get employment? I'm kind of confused, because you were talking about how you were working with the schools.

Davis

We're talking about students who are on vacation during the summer, and then we also used the out-of-school students who were seeking employment at the time.

Espino

Okay, so you would place them to work at the shipyards.

Davis

Yes, or--I mean, they were just all over.

Espino

But specifically in the shipyards was where you had some conflict with some of the--

Davis

Yes, but also with other Federal agencies.

Espino

So people who were not activists who had these young kids placed in their place of business, it wasn't always a welcome.

Davis

No. They were very leery about having the young people there and so on, but they had remarkable influence on the kids. After the kids started getting their money, some of them would just widely spend the money. I remember with girls, they would go out and buy shoes, a whole bunch of shoes. But they got them little by little to change their hairdos and the way they dressed and so on, and by then they were making enough money, and it made a difference in the person's life.

Espino

So do you think that was a good thing, to have them change their hair and the way they dressed?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

You don't think it took away from their individuality or their identity?

Davis

No, because there weren't such very drastic changes, and this made them dress for work and not for school.

Espino

I see. So how did these kids become part of the program?

Davis

We had places where they would enroll. If they were in school, there would be somebody there who would enroll them. Sometimes they were in the program already, but then this was the summer version of it. So we usually had this woman, Jane Dawson, she handled all of the coordinators and things.

Espino

Do you remember any schools that you worked with specifically, any of the schools that you worked with? Were they in East Los Angeles?

Davis

I didn't have anything to do with them directly. That way, especially I think I was in with the Labor already, and I just oversaw the county, the Jane Dawson person, to make sure she did her job with the individual schools.

Espino

She was under you.

Davis

Well, she didn't really work for me, but I oversaw the program. I was the project director from Labor and oversaw what the city was doing.

Espino

Those were really important programs. I was reading about how in East Los Angeles some of the kids that would eventually become the Brown Berets were participants in the Economic Youth and Opportunity Agency. Do you remember that occurring, the kids in East Los Angeles?

Davis

No, not really. I on occasion visited the Brown Berets, would go to some of their meetings. Not very often, just to show support and so on.

Espino

With the poverty money they formed the Young Chicanos for--well, initially it was the Young Citizens for Community Action, and then it became later on the Young Chicanos for Community Action, and then they became the Brown Berets. Do you remember the Young Citizens for Community Action?

Davis

No, I don't. Were they funded or something? They weren't funded as the Brown Berets. They were looked on as rebels.

Espino

The Brown Berets?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

But some of those organizations were created--I'm not sure if they had money, but they were created under the ideal of helping our own community, kind of that War on Poverty, self-help philosophy of the early sixties. Later on they became more militant, and like they did some of the militant strategies like Tijerina, and they organized the boycott of the--the walkouts--not the boycott, the walkouts of the high schools.

Davis

But I don't think they were Brown Berets involved in that, though. I know that, in fact, Phil Montes and Sal Castro, who was a teacher, and--I'm trying to think of the other teacher. There were a couple of teachers. Sal Castro was at Lincoln High School, and he was one of the schools that walked out. But they were strictly concerned with the school district and making demands for changes there. I can still just see this man. They've all become very well to do in what they're doing. This other one, you know Buena Vista, if you see them on television sometimes or something, the man who is the head of it, Buena Vista, walked out, was one of the teachers that walked out. I know that Phil Montes, who was with the Civil Rights Commission, worked very closely with the walkouts about their rights.

Espino

Did you go to any of those meetings or any of those--

Davis

No. I think I was probably married and had children at that time. I don't remember if my husband [Ray Davis] was at Lincoln at that time or not.

Espino

I'm going to pause it just for a second, because I think your microphone is falling a little too--[Recorder turned off.]

Espino

--make sure it's recording. Okay. So that wasn't something that was a big issue for you, the student walkouts, because you were doing other things at that time.

Davis

No. We supported it, because my husband was a teacher, and we were aware of the conditions at Lincoln High School. He taught there. I know we went to meetings later, supporting the teachers who had walked out. I think they were arrested, too, or something. But we were very supportive of the walkouts, because we personally knew the conditions at Lincoln High School, and they were probably that way at other schools, too.

Espino

Right. I'm going to sneeze. I'm going to pause it.[Recorder turned off.]

Espino

Okay. So you were telling me that your husband at Lincoln High School experienced the walkouts firsthand, because he was a teacher.

Davis

Right. Yes. It's funny, just this weekend I went to a fundraiser for Lincoln Heights and Sacred Heart High School. It was a scholarship fundraiser, and there were two teachers there from Lincoln, and they said they came in support of the effort to provide scholarships. They were talking about all kinds of things, of classes that they had, and the things that the counselors did, and my husband didn't have any of that. For instance, he would talk to his students about going to college and get them interested in that, and then when he went to the counselors to see about getting information about the

colleges, the counselors wouldn't support him because they said the students weren't eligible for that because they were mainly Mexican.

Espino

So this was even in the sixties?

Davis

Oh yes.

Espino

They weren't encouraging?

Davis

No, not at the Mexican schools.

Espino

Was Lincoln High School predominantly Mexican at that time?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

It wasn't mixed?

Davis

Yes, it was mixed, but I mean they would probably cater to the white students, but there weren't that many asking for scholarships.

Espino

What was it that your husband taught?

Davis

English. Journalism. In fact, there's a young man--not that young anymore; he's sixty or something--but he was one of the first students that my husband had in Lincoln. I remember he was so small, he would barely see the top over the desk and so on. I know my husband got him to go to Franklin because they had a better journalists' program there for him. He later came to work for the

city when I was deputy mayor. He worked for the Community Development Department. So I knew him when he was in school, and I hadn't seen him for years, and then I saw him in the city, and we became friends again and good contacts. Again, I hadn't seen him for years, but we have a friend in common [Alberto Juarez] that we both keep track of, Joe Sanchez, and out of the clear--well, I know Joe would keep me informed about what what's-his-name--golly, I can't think of his name now. But he would tell me about him, and he would encourage him to contact me, which he finally did. He and his wife came over and spent an hour or two with me. We were reminiscing about going to school and all.

Davis

Then it just so happened that the next week my husband was coming up from Mexico and leaving from here with my son [Alfred] and daughter [Deirdra] and my grandson [Alfred Jr.], and they were all going to Michigan for a family reunion. So I called--God, I can't think of his name [Alberto Juarez]. But I called them and invited him for dinner the night that my husband arrived here from Mexico, and they had a reunion. They hadn't seen each other since he was a little boy, and it was quite a thrill for the teacher to meet the pupil.

Espino

Were there a lot of success stories like that of your husband's students who went on to do important things?

Davis

There is one other person that he's trying to reach, Jesse Franco. She is now a school administrator, and he'd like to get a hold of her, because she was also a special student. This guy, I can't think of his name.

Espino

When you think of it, you can let me know that. So that was an important tactic, the student walkouts, and then there were the other tactics that were being used, like the demonstration. That was not common in the fifties. You know, the CSO, did they ever organize a demonstration?

Davis

No, I don't think so.

Espino

The Chicano Moratorium that happened--I guess that happened much later. That happened more towards the seventies. Maybe I should back up a little.

Davis

I was with Labor then.

Espino

Maybe I should back up a little bit and talk about JFK [John F. Kennedy] and his impact, if he had one, on the Mexican American community. A lot of people who became activists really took to heart what he said about doing something for your country. Do you think that influenced the Mexican youth in East Los Angeles?

Davis

I think it had a very positive thing throughout the community, the grownups as well. It was a very refreshing approach to things and so on. We were really looking forward to a long administration from him.

Espino

Do you remember when he was running for president? Did you help on his campaign?

Davis

Oh yes.

Espino

You did. What did you do specifically?

Davis

We worked with the Democratic Club down here, the Northeast Democratic Club. I'd been a member for years of that and still am. But they did get out the vote a lot. I remember helping them do telephoning to precincts. They used to give me the lists with the phone numbers, and I would do the phoning. Then I know we had a meeting in East L.A. for him, a community meeting, and I

remember attending that, and the Secret Service people trying to keep you away from the candidate and so on.

Espino

He was actually there. Was it packed? Were there a lot of people?

Davis

Oh yes. Oh, it was jammed. You could hardly move.

Espino

Where was it held, do you remember?

Davis

I don't remember.

Espino

Was it a big hall?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

So he was inspiring--

Davis

He was.

Espino

--to a lot of people. Did you find it easy to get people to volunteer for his campaign?

Davis

Oh yes. Yes. Everybody was just so happy about that.

Espino

Is there anything specific that really struck you about him at the time?

Davis

No, but I wonder if his being a Catholic didn't have something to do, too, with the community. I just can't help but think that it had something to do with it, because here was the first time an open Catholic running for president.

Espino

Were people talking about that?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

That he was a Catholic?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Because it seems also that some people didn't like him because he was a Catholic.

Davis

Yes. No, but he openly went to church, so he wasn't just saying he was a Catholic; he was a Catholic.

Espino

Right. Do you think that some of his ideas also were important?

Davis

Yes. Well, I know the stand he took for civil rights and so on, and included the Mexicans on this, you know.

Espino

Was [Lyndon B.] Johnson popular at the same time as well?

Davis

I think Johnson was used to Mexicans from Texas. I know he worked with them in his ranch. So I know at first probably there was a lot of hesitation

about how we were going to take him, but when he started the poverty programs, I think people woke up to listening to him.

Espino

So before JFK's assassination Johnson was not all that popular.

Davis

I don't remember hearing about him out here. Maybe in Texas people knew him, but we had to get to know him.

Espino

So his being added to the ticket didn't make it more popular. Just JFK alone was the--

Davis

I don't remember him at all.

Espino

Can you tell me anything you remember about the assassination and where you were or how you felt or how you reacted?

Davis

I'm trying to remember, because I think I was home with my son, who was little then, cleaning or something, and couldn't believe what I was hearing on the television. I remember I had to call somebody. But it was just a shock. It really took a while to penetrate that he was no longer going to be there.

Espino

Did you attend any memorials or any--

Davis

No. I remember that I had gone to the doctor and later at home he called me that I had walking pneumonia. So I remember when he died and being sick and lying on the couch and watching television over and over and over again. I don't remember any special memorial for him.

Espino

What about your friends? Did people talk about it afterwards?

Davis

Oh yes. I remember my boss at Labor and just people all around at work and so on. It seemed to hit everybody. I don't remember anybody not reacting to it.

Espino

Did it change your view about the future of the projects that you wanted to see happen?

Davis

No. Well, I don't remember that he had implemented any particular programs. With Johnson coming out with his poverty programs, we just got involved in that, and that's what we were looking forward to.

Espino

So when Kennedy was elected, you were looking forward to some of the programs that he was going to implement, but he hadn't done anything yet.

Davis

No, not yet. But we knew in general, immigration and civil rights, education.

Espino

And then do you remember the assassination of Martin Luther King?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

And what you were doing at that time?

Davis

I don't remember where I was then. [I was at work with my boss, Mr. Reynolds.] I remember watching on television when--what's his name, the man who shot him [James Earl Ray]? I can't remember his name, but I remember watching him when he got shot.

Espino

Is it Lee Harvey--no that was who shot Kennedy.

Davis

Yes, that was JFK. I don't remember.

Espino

Were there ceremonies for his memorial?

Davis

I don't know in the Mexican community if there were. Among the black community and if you had friends in the black community, you were involved in some of them.

Espino

But you didn't attend any yourself.

Davis

I don't remember attending.

Espino

Can you maybe describe a little bit the mood at that time? I mean, having these two tragic--

Davis

Very hopeless.

Espino

Do you remember feeling that?

Davis

Yes. Really it just seemed like the people who were fighting and who were finally going to do something for you had gone.

Espino

Did you see a change in people's activism after that? Were people more worried about their safety?

Davis

I think they probably were afraid. It was very quiet there for a while. But mainly I remember just a hopelessness.

Espino

So what were some of the things that helped you to kind of--how did you focus your energies after that?

Davis

I think that was about the time that--did Roybal run for supervisor then?

Espino

No. He was assassinated in 1963, so I guess Martin Luther King, I don't have the date of his assassination, but it was also in the sixties. Then there was the Watts Riots. That was 1965.

Davis

That was really scary.

Espino

The Watts Riots?

Davis

Yes. I was with Labor by that time, and I know we were worried about Ted Watkins being right in the middle of it all. I don't remember if it was that riot. There was a time when the riots, and I remember my son [Alfred] going with another boy to go take pictures. The boy was someone that I had taken into my house, and my son used to call him brother. He came out of the ghetto. He'd lived there with his grandmother, and he was involved with a gang, so he knew the area real well and talked my sons into going with him, and they went and took pictures of the riot, of the buildings all in flames.

Espino

Was this little boy African American?

Davis

No. No. Mike Ferrante. He was [half] Italian, I guess.

Espino

And he lived in South Central.

Davis

Yes. He used to live right off of Central with his grandmother. When his grandmother died, his father lived down the street [from me], and Mike lived with him. He didn't get along with his father, so I remember taking him in, and he used to sleep in my [son's room]--they put a bed in there. I don't know where they got the bed, but they had a bed, and they had two beds in there. He later--it was real tragic. He had been in jail for drug possession, and when he got out, he called us here and nobody was home. So he ended up going to the woman that he had been living with and he had children by her. He spent the first night there, but then the next day he was going to go visit, go to the old community, and somehow the guys got to him, and he overdosed and died.

Espino

Oh, that's tragic.

Davis

Yes. I remember my son and children took over the responsibility to bury him. The guys all from South Central. We know one guy--I can't think of his name, but who's a social worker [Noel]. He himself grew up in South Central, but he is now a social worker, and he collected money from all the boys, the gangs and so on, and we had a regular funeral. They shopped around and found a mortuary on either 1st Street or Whittier or something. And then I remember the stone that they put on his grave. He used to be a fantastic artist and used to paint little homeboys, so we found some that we had here in the house from him, and his stone has the little homeboys on it and a picture of him.

Espino

So he was in a Mexican gang in South Central?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Or an African American gang?

Davis

No, Mexican.

Espino

And he dressed like a homeboy himself?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

But he was Italian. That's interesting.

Davis

I don't remember that he dressed like them or anything.

Espino

Oh, okay. And those pictures that they took, do you have those?

Davis

My son has them, I guess.

Espino

Really. It would be interesting to see from the perspective of--how old were they? Probably what, fifteen, sixteen?

Davis

My son was born in '60.

Espino

That must have been later, because the Watts Riots were in 1965. He couldn't have been--

Davis

So it must have been later.

Espino

He couldn't have been five years old taking pictures. He was born in '60; it must have been much later. Could it have been in the nineties, the L.A. Uprising after the Rodney King--maybe that's when it was.

Davis

Maybe or something.

Espino

Yes, much, much, much later. So maybe we can move on to talk a little bit about some of the--well, the whole move. The Brown Berets, we talked a little bit about that, and the evolution of the youth group into a more militant--a community service group into a more militant group, which was the Brown Berets. It seemed that was happening throughout East Los Angeles, where there was a move--

Davis

It never was very large. It didn't have that many people that belonged to it.

Espino

But there were other groups that formed that were more militant. Even the whole term Chicano was adopted, which was a more militant move away from Mexican American.

Davis

And the women particularly, I remember their telling me that the men wanted them to act like we used to act in organizations. They wanted them to be subservient to them. They had said no, that they were entitled to the leadership, too, and I remember that had a very positive effect on the--I remember these were students, but they were in the Chicana movement at Fullerton College. I had been invited to come and speak to them, and I remember their talking about their identity. They were really struggling to come up with something, and they decided they were not going to be subservient to the men.

Espino

So would you describe yourself that way, that you were subservient in those early organizations?

Davis

No, I wasn't, but having come out of CSO and not being given the opportunity to be somebody, too, I was glad for them that they had come to this recognition and so on.

Espino

So also in MAPA was it the same situation where you felt like you were limited because you were a woman?

Davis

I think at the beginning, yes. It wasn't till later when women started to run themselves for office.

Espino

So you understood what they were talking about when they said that they didn't want to be subservient.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Even though you wouldn't describe yourself as subservient.

Davis

No.

Espino

But you could see their point.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

How did you feel about the use of the term Chicano and Chicana?

Davis

Well, I felt that this was their movement, and they had a right to whatever they thought was best for them. I myself was still used to being a Mexican American, and when I would go speak to students or Chicanos or something, I know I was corrected a couple of times. I said "Mexican American," and they would say, "Chicano," and then I would correct myself. So I had to be very careful, depending on the group that I spoke to, to say "Chicano." At the very beginning it was very important to say "Chicano."

Davis

I also remember--I think this was a meeting to do with the Board of Education, but there was a GI who hadn't been a member before of--I think it was MAPA at that time. We were saying "Mexican American" or something, and I remember that he gave a very strong speech about the fact that they were Chicanos.

Espino

So in some circles you would actually use "Mexican American," and in other circles--

Davis

Yes. When I was with the older people, I would say "Mexican American," and when I was with students, it would be "Chicanos."

Espino

Did you feel uncomfortable having to use those two?

Davis

No.

Espino

How would you describe yourself?

Davis

I eventually came to call myself Chicana, too.

Espino

You adopted that.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

That's interesting. Can you tell me a little bit about the move away from--well, you were already describing some of the young women that you would meet and how they wanted to change their roles to be more leadership roles, and that's what led to the formation of the Comisión Femenil in Los Angeles.

Davis

Yes. I'm trying to remember where we had the first meeting. No, I guess it wasn't the first meeting. But I know we had that group. Francisca--I can't think of her last name.

Espino

Flores? Francisca Flores?

Davis

Flores, yes. She was a key element in the development. She had a reputation of having been liberal, but she was accepted by everybody. I think it had to do with the constitution, and I don't remember where we were at, but I remember Connie Muñoz and her husband Frank Muñoz were at the meeting, at the conference. We were talking about the constitution, and some of the people, of the women, wanted to limit the membership to people who, I guess, lived in cities or--I just remember what the point was. But I remember that Gloria Molina was very active, and she got up. She was short, and she got up on a chair and was really advocating that point. Francisca Flores, I remember, spoke up and made the point of being inclusive of everybody rather than excluding some portion of the Chicana community. I remember there was a woman there, and she came from some rural area, and she had brought her baby with her, and the baby was sitting on the blanket there, and she was participating. This is what we wanted, to be included.

Espino

Would that ever happen in the earlier organizations, your experience with CSO or MAPA? Would you see a woman with her baby?

Davis

I don't ever remember seeing that.

Espino

You don't remember seeing that.

Davis

Not in CSO or MAPA.

Espino

Do you think this--because I remember a little bit of the history of the formation of Comisión Femenil, and it occurred at a issues conference in Sacramento, where women wanted to have--or Chicanas wanted to have a caucus, their own--a place where they could meet just as women. Do you think that would have been it, what you're talking about?

Davis

No, this was not in Sacramento. I think maybe it was Santa Barbara.

Espino

And it was a meeting with both men and women?

Davis

It wasn't with men and women that this happened. Connie had been married to Frank for a long time, and he was very supportive of everything she did.

Espino

So Frank Muñoz was the one male in the room?

Davis

Yes, but remember I told you that later on in life he was one of the persons who was reacting to Louie Lomax. So when they see it happening to you, it's something different.

Espino

Were you a good friend of Francisca Flores?

Davis

Oh yes, very. Later she also became the director of the Chicana Community Action Organization, and there was a center [Chicana Service Action Center], a Chicana movement center where she provided job training for women and social services. That's still going. It's on 1st Street there. She moved to San Diego, and I remember--I don't remember. [Sandy Sewell] I'm trying to remember who the girl was, but somebody drove me all the way down to go see her, and she was already a little spaced out, so I think she had Alzheimer at the end.

Espino

She was about your age?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

And so at that time she was one of the older-generation women. You said she was a little bit liberal. What do you mean by that? But people liked her. How would you define that?

Davis

I'm not sure if we actually thought or it was rumored that she was a Communist. If she was, I never saw any--she was just part of our organizations. She was a part of MAPA.

Espino

Is that how you met her, through MAPA?

Davis

I don't remember if it was also the CSO. I don't remember that she was that active in MAPA. I know when she started the center, she pretty much devoted all her time to that.

Espino

Yes. That was much later, in the seventies, when the center actually opened, because Comisión was founded in 1970, and then the center was opened a couple of years after that. So I'm just wondering before that, I know she had the newsletter, Carta Editorial, she would edit, and then there was another. Regeneración was another publication.

Davis

I think Santa Barbara got all her papers.

Espino

I'm not sure.

Davis

I'm almost sure that Comisión's papers all went to Santa Barbara.

Espino

Yes, that's true. Comisión's papers went to Santa Barbara. Her personal papers relating to her life might also be with that collection.

Davis

Yes, I think they were part of that, because the papers for Regeneración, I remember them mentioning that particularly. We wanted the papers to go to UCLA, and Comisión had several meetings about that. That one time I don't remember, but they were having the meeting at Joe Sanchez's house near the Griffith Park. It was over to where he lives at. Laura [Sanchez], his wife, said they could use her house. Well, the person who was inviting everybody did not invite this woman--what's her name? [Sandy Sewell] Anyway, she blamed Laura for it, and Laura kept saying she didn't have anything to do with the invitations. Anyway, whatever happened, the woman was able to get enough people on her side to vote, and they voted to take the papers to Santa Barbara, and the university took them.

Espino

So there was a conflict, where the papers should go in the end. Well, it looks like we need to stop here, and we'll probably pick up on Comisión again the

next time, if you can try to remember some of the details of that early organization. Okay, thanks, Grace.[End of interview]

1.7. Session 7 (October 13, 2008)

Espino

This is Virginia Espino, and today is October 13, 2008. I'm interviewing Grace Montañez Davis at her home in Highland Park, California.

Espino

Okay, Grace, today we're finally reaching the seventies, and I'd like to talk about some of the changes that you saw as someone who was active in the fifties and in the sixties and who saw the different types of activism that occurred, starting with the late sixties and then moving on into the seventies, especially in relation to women. Do you remember any specific changes that you witnessed?

Davis

Not so much in the sixties. I guess there were some changes. Because of the Poverty Program they were hiring a lot of people in the community. Actually, they contracted with community organizations to run their programs, and therefore a lot of community people got employed, in the schools, too. In the seventies I think we began to see a lot of the boys who had been in the service who were now going to school because of the GI Bill, and they started a lot of movements. Somehow Chicanas got involved who were either in school, also, or in the community. I remember one time going to visit a group of women at Fullerton College, and they told me that if they left it up to the men, they would be in the same position that I had been in of just being behind the scenes and doing the cooking, the serving, and so on. But they said that they were not going to allow that. I mean, they were very determined, and it made an impression on me, too, that women were beginning to speak up and so on. These were young women.

Espino

Do you remember if they were part of a organization or a group?

Davis

I don't remember what group I had gone to speak to, but it was an organization within the university.

Espino

And they were primarily Chicanas, Mexican American?

Davis

Yes, they were Chicanas. Yes.

Espino

And they were students?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

So you noticed a difference between that attitude and the one that your generation had.

Davis

Oh yes. Yes, because we were just happy to be there and participate, and we were happy. It never occurred to us. Maybe some of them did, like Alvina Carillo, who did the citizenship classes and so on. She just, you know, emerged as a leader.

Espino

Did they talk about any specific ways they wanted to lead within the movement, these women at Fullerton?

Davis

No, they just wanted to participate in the leadership, so they wanted to be appointed. If there were appointments that were being made, they wanted to be there.

Espino

And this same attitude was also shared by some of the women who formed the Comisión Femenil in the seventies?

Davis

Yes. They definitely were in the leadership, and they didn't allow men to be members, but they used to allow them to come in the meetings and things that they had. I never saw men at the meetings but only at the initial conference. There were some activists there. Frank Muñoz, I remember, had been there, but he was just observing. He was there with his wife, Connie Muñoz, who's now a lawyer. Yes, she struggled to be a lawyer. She took the exam many times before she passed it. There were a number of women with her, and she's the one who made it. I'm trying to think of who--there's something in my mind that there's one particular person. Maybe it was Lilia [Aceves], I'm not sure; because they went to the People's School of Law. I think it was Lilia who took the exam many times but never succeeded. But Connie did.

Espino

Are they about the same age, Lillian and Connie?

Davis

Yes. I think Connie may be a little younger; I'm not sure.

Espino

So you mentioned that Connie's husband, Frank, participated in one of the early meetings of the Comisión Femenil.

Davis

I think it was at Santa Barbara where we had this meeting. We were forming the constitution, and there were women from all over, from other states, too. That was the one that Gloria Molina was there. She was short, and I remember her standing up on the chair and addressing the women. She was trying to exclude I don't remember what category of women, but there were women there--there was somebody there--oh, Art Torres, his wife was there with their baby.

Espino

Yolanda Nava? No. Yolanda Nava? Is that Art Torres' wife? No.

Davis

No. Maybe it is; I'm not sure.

Espino

I think Yolanda Nava was married to Art Torres. She was young. She was of Gloria Molina's generation.

Davis

Yes. Yes, she's the one who was. Then later they divorced.

Espino

So Gloria Molina was trying to exclude some women?

Davis

Not really completely exclude them from the organization. I'm not sure if it was only women from this state or something, and we had women there from out of state.

Espino

Do you think it was from a certain organization that she was trying to exclude?

Davis

No. I don't remember now.

Espino

I remember that there were some tensions between Comisión Femenil and the welfare rights organization. Do you think that might have been one of the-

Davis

No, no. I just don't remember. [There were women from outside of Los Angeles. There was a rural woman from out of state. Gloria didn't think they should vote on the constitution.]

Espino

Maybe it will come to you. Okay. So she got up on a chair.

Davis

Yes, and addressed the whole audience there. I don't remember if Frank spoke or something, but I just remember he was there. Francisca--oh, what's her name--

Espino

Flores.

Davis

--Flores was there. Those are the ones that come to mind, although there were other people there, a lot of local women and so on.

Espino

Do you recall there being a lot of disagreement between different ideas, different camps of ideologies?

Davis

Not really. They were trying to really organize an organization that would be run by women and give opportunities to women and so on. Our disagreements, I don't remember that we had any. I do remember the Department of Labor had a conference. They were going all over the nation in the different regions and having women groups meet. They had a Women's Bureau. I remember the meeting was, I think, in Phoenix. It was in Arizona. A lot of the women went to that meeting, and I remember, for some reason, they had invited the director of labor at the regional level, Dr. Ed Aguirre. He was an old friend of mind since I knew him before in Labor, and they invited him to come and speak to this conference. I know that there was a lot of discussion about who was going to, but again, he spoke to them and told them, "Do you have a proposal or anything?"

Davis

And Francisca Flores said yes, she had one [for the Chicana Center], and he agreed to help her fund it, and I had to work with that right there at the conference to rewrite her proposal to make it acceptable, and he took it with him to the region and had them work on it there. That's how the Chicana Center [Chicana Service Action Center] got funded. That was an effort on the part of Francisca.

Espino

So this was at the meeting in Santa Barbara, that you think it happened in Santa Barbara where Gloria Molina was there and Yolanda Nava. And Ed Aguirre was--

Davis

No, not there. This was in Arizona.

Espino

So this was another meeting.

Davis

Another meeting, at a meeting of the Department of Labor and the Women Bureau, yes.

Espino

And this was after Comisión had already formed.

Davis

Oh yes, and I know that there were a lot of women who went from Los Angeles.

Espino

I see. And she had a proposal, just the same way that Dionicio [Morales] had a proposal, for these projects that they wanted to start and have funded. So it sounds like the Department of Labor played an important role for Chicanos and Chicanas in Los Angeles--

Davis

Yes.

Espino

--funding a lot of different programs.

Davis

Right. I remember coming back to Los Angeles and calling my boss [Bob Reynolds]. I think he was going up on Monday for a staff meeting; he used to go up every Monday. I called him Sunday as soon as I got home and told him about the proposal that Aguirre had and would probably give him so that we could fund it. And then when he came back to Los Angeles, he brought the proposal back with him, and then he and I worked on it, and with Francisca. Yes.

Espino

I can't remember the date that the Chicana Service Action Center was, but it was like early seventies, '72, '73, and Lilia Aceves was one of the first directors of that.

Davis

No. No, she was not a director of--

Espino

Of the Chicana Service--

Davis

Chicanas, no.

Espino

Are you sure?

Davis

No, Francisca was.

Espino

Francisca was a director? I think Lilia was also one of the directors, early directors.

Davis

I don't remember.

Espino

I remember talking to her once, and she could not get involved in other projects because she was so immersed in the Chicana Service Action Center, in the early years. But we can find that out, you know, what exactly are the facts. Does anything stand out for you about Comisión Femenil and what was important to them that you remember? You know, why did they need a separate organization just for women?

Davis

I know that they were mainly professional women. They were going into different fields, and they were lending support to each other. Their meetings usually addressed some skill that they needed to cultivate and so on. I'm trying to think if they were concerned with abortion, with women's rights to make decisions about their own body. No, it's something I remember; they became very active in this. The county hospital was sterilizing women, the poor women who were on relief and so on, and I remember they became very active in that field. They had women who were studying to be lawyers or had become lawyers, and they helped a lot. I think they actually sued the county hospital to put a stop to that.

Espino

Yes, I did some research on that myself. My dissertation is a bit about that. Well, it's a lot about that topic. Gloria Molina was instrumental in that. Do you remember that happening, or do you remember how you heard about it?

Davis

I remember being at a meeting, at several meetings, and this was the topic that they talked about.

Espino

So they brought it to the larger--

Davis

Yes. They actually had a suit, I think.

Espino

Did you hear about the sterilizations from any other group or--

Davis

No, just at the meetings and so on.

Espino

--or the newspaper, radio, television? Do you remember seeing anything about it?

Davis

No, I don't, but it probably got publicity, too. Yes. They were mainly professional women, and they gave each other support. I didn't go to all their meetings, but I used to go when they had a special meeting that interests me.

Espino

Did you see yourself similar to them or different?

Davis

No. I would fight with them. Yes, and I've always kept in touch with them. Sandy Sewell, she--I don't even remember. I think it was a daycare center, which was somewhere off of 1st Street, but more toward inner city. She was very active in Comisión.

Espino

Yes, that's true. I think that was a little bit later, late seventies more than early, early seventies. So you mentioned also, in addition to Comisión Femenil, that was a women's center. That seemed to be something that was different in the seventies than in the sixties and the fifties, that there were these women-centered organizations, and although it wasn't called a white-woman-only organization, NOW, the National Organization for Women, was primarily white Anglo women. But you said you were also a member of that.

Davis

When they first started, I was a member, and I went to some meetings. But then I didn't see Hispanic women there, and I think maybe one or two blacks, but they were prominent women who were in leadership and so on already. I think Yvonne Burke maybe was a member, and Maxine Waters. But they

didn't stay there, because I guess they felt their efforts should be more focused on the community, which is what I did.

Espino

Do you recall what some of the issues were at some of those meetings? I know it was a long time ago, but what their priorities were with the NOW organization?

Davis

No. Just whatever, I guess, affected women, and increased representation at every level and so on. The one thing about NOW that I remember in the seventies, they had a lot of lawyers, women who were lawyers, and they participated in Washington to develop the Woman of the Year Conference [National Women's Conference, 1977] that they had every year. I know they had it in Mexico and in different countries, but this time they were having it here in Dallas, Texas. They started by having statewide organizations in each state, and they were to select a chairwoman and a co-chairwoman and other officials, I don't remember which ones. Then from there they would pick delegates to the conference. Well, I don't know if Carter was president then, but somehow there were Chicanas in the office of the Women's Commission who were organizing this thing, and there was a Chicana, I don't know what her position was, but she was contacting Hispanics all over the country, which was a first, because usually other people did or did not contact us. So she kept in steady contact us and made sure that we were involved in the organization here in California.

Davis

Well, the blacks wanted to be chairman, and they put a lot of pressure on us, to the point where I know when we got together to select the--we were in a hotel having a weekend conference to select the chairperson, and I know that some of the women were threatened by the blacks about who they were going to vote for. I know that I had been approached to be chairperson, but we didn't want to start something with the blacks. There were a lot of blacks who came and participated from all over the state, and not that many Chicanas, but there were some. They ended up being chairperson, and I got voted the co-chair. So that's how we got representation.

Davis

At the conference I remember--no, this must be another conference. No, Sandy Sewell was there, she and a couple of other delegates, and they had tote bags of Chicana Center and a lot of other stuff, and I know they put it out. The thing that was good about the conference was all these lawyers who organized it and everything, they organized it to every point at the convention. They instructed us about how to take over the microphones. They had microphones on the floor. And the--what is it, the Right to Live, or what's the anti-abortion group? They were en masse, men and women, and I know when we went outside the councils--sometimes we'd walk over to town--we would hide our badges so this anti-abortion group wouldn't know that we were--because we were afraid of them attacking us. They used to parade through the hall and the balcony with great big pictures of fetus. But somehow we managed to control the convention, and we would be asking questions and participating, but we would all be there, and we would rush to the microphones to control them.

Davis

Speakers, I remember the president's wives were all there, Johnson's wife [Claudia Alta "Lady Bird" Taylor Johnson], and I'm almost sure Carter was in office then, because I think his wife [Rosalyn Carter] was there, and Mrs. [Betty] Ford. We had about three presidents' wives who came as a special assembly. But we were able to dominate. They had caucuses during the conference in which we were instructed and so on. We had a Hispanic caucus. I remember the Puerto Ricans. There were two sections of Puerto Rican, Puerto Ricans who lived on the island and Puerto Ricans who lived in the United States, and they both had different agendas. I'm trying to remember what we were doing, because for some reason, Sandy Sewell thought that we had excluded her. I assured her that wasn't true. I know I had been brought in backstage. Just a couple of us were there, and I brought Sandy Sewell just to show her that she wasn't excluded.

Davis

I didn't realize there was this division among the Puerto Ricans, and I committed to whatever group was talking to me, and later to find out that there was another group. The Chicanas had a part of the document that was

going to emerge from the conference, and I remember I got Sandy Sewell to read part of it. But Gloria Steinem helped us out on the fight we had with the Puerto Ricans, and she agreed to some press conference that they were having where they were advocating for the island, the statehood for the island, and she committed herself to go to that press conference in order to alleviate the tension that we had.

Davis

I remember in the back of the conference room Congressman George Brown was there all by himself, standing at the back of the conference room, eating a hot dog and listening to us. We were seated according to states, and California was toward the back. We had one of the largest representations. So I could see him.

Espino

So the representation, this was the diverse group that you're talking about, with African Americans, Chicanas, and were there other groups represented?

Davis

I don't remember other groups, but the others were white.

Espino

Probably white. So there was an African American woman who was chair of the California--

Davis

California, yes.

Davis

And you were the--

Davis

Co-chair.

Espino

Co-chair. So you organized before the big meeting, and then you went.

Davis

We went to the conference, yes.

Espino

Did you have a platform from California of issues that were important to California women?

Davis

We had a separate Chicana thing in the report of the conference. I wonder if I have that. I know I have a poster, but I don't remember--because I know the Congress published the report of the conference.

Espino

Because it was a conference that was sponsored by the administration at that time.

Davis

Yes, the Women's Commission.

Espino

And the Women's Commission was formed in the seventies, do you remember?

Davis

In the early seventies, I think. A friend of mine [*NAME?] here in the community who was also active in certain things, she was a Republican, and the previous administration she had been the commissioner [of the National Women's Commission]. For this conference they invited the former commissioners to attend, and so I went with her so I wouldn't go alone. She went with me, the two of us. She had a friend of hers who also had been a commissioner, and they met there. They had fur coats and I don't know what, all kind of jewelry. The first night--or not the first night, but this is the room that we had, the two Republicans and me. We had a room with two twin beds and the cot, and we took turns sleeping on the cot. I don't know where they went. Most of the day they were gone, the two of them, and they would just show up for the special items on the agenda.

Davis

I remember that there were a lot of lesbians at the conference. There were some in our delegation, and I remember that they were very strong voters, and they had very strong opinions.

Espino

Do you remember anything specific about what they advocated or what they demanded?

Davis

The big issue had to do with the right of women to control their own body. I know it was an anti-abortion issue and that they were all very much supporting it, like they are now with Proposition 8.

Espino

Oh, you mean a pro-abortion, a pro-choice issue.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

I guess they would call it at that time "pro-abortion." Now they call it "pro-choice." Right. Well, that, to me, seems like it would have been very controversial, because many Chicanas were, you know, of Catholic faith. Do you remember any discussions around that?

Davis

No. I don't know how many practicing Catholics there were. I don't remember any of them, but they all were very for feminists and so on. So like I wasn't going to church in those days, either.

Espino

I know the Comisión Femenil had a hard time with that issue, because although the women themselves might have been pro right to abortion, that never became their formal platform, I don't think.

Davis

No. The time they were against the county hospital, it was because sterilization of the women on welfare, I think.

Espino

Yes. Actually, I guess they were talking about having choice rather than advocating abortion. It was a different way they articulated it, because they didn't want to alienate people in their community.

Davis

Yes. Yes, being Hispanic.

Espino

So you don't remember any discussions around that issue?

Davis

No.

Espino

So most of the women at that conference were probably pro-choice, do you think? Was that something that came out in the platform of the conference?

Davis

Yes, they were pretty much that, and we were against all these pro-choice men and women.

Espino

Oh, the pro-life.

Davis

Pro-life people, yes.

Espino

Who were intimidating?

Davis

Yes, because that's why we used to hide our badge when we went out, because there were men, too, and they would hassle us.

Espino

Do you remember what it was like before, before the Roe v. Wade, when--I don't know if you ever had any experience with women who needed to get an abortion or wanted to get an abortion, what it was like for people on the Eastside. If a woman got pregnant and she didn't want to keep the baby, what happened before Roe v. Wade?

Davis

I know from personal experience that there was a woman who used to help women who needed an abortion. She used to use a catheter. I don't know what she charged or anything, but I know that if they had more than one abortion, that she would charge them more, hoping that that would deter them from having an abortion.

Espino

So you know people who had a successful abortion from her?

Davis

Yes. I knew her because this man who was--I don't remember if he was active, I think in CSO [Community Service Organization], too. He used to come, Solomon Roy. He was the one who told me about this lady. He later turned out to be an informant for the FBI.

Espino

Really.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Did the woman ever wind up in jail?

Davis

I don't know. Yes, Marian [Graff]. Yes, he was active in CSO, because even Marian knew him. I remember when I was expecting my first child, he used to come to the house and pick me up so we could go to meetings and things. So

he was always a very friendly, kind person. It was just disturbing to find--I know that when I was working for [Tom] Bradley--this was before, when he first got elected--and I think I was on the committee that named the commissioners for all the departments for Bradley. I remember Sol calling me and asked me to meet him in the lobby of the Federal Building. I guess I was still working for the Department of Labor, because Bradley was still going through getting settled. And he had a briefcase that he kept holding. He was asking me if I knew who was being appointed to the police commissioner, which I didn't know at that time. Later we decided, after we found out about him, that he was--and he was a policeman, by the way. He was a policeman and was an informant for the FBI, and I guess he wanted to know who was going to be directing the police department.

Espino

Do you think that was his real name?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

That was his real name that he used.

Davis

Yes, yes.

Espino

How did you find out that he was an informant?

Davis

I don't remember.

Espino

But it was much later?

Davis

Not much later after Bradley had been installed; somewhere around there. There were several people who turned out to be informants.

Espino

Yes, that must have been a strange feeling to think somebody was your friend and your confidant, and they were spying on you.

Davis

The spying they did, now it's ridiculous. I know that they published--this was like I don't know how long ago, but there was a report that was put out by Congress, and I know Dionicio Morales' organization was named as a suspect organization. It was ridiculous.

Espino

They would also eventually infiltrate some of the Chicano movement organizations.

Davis

Oh, they did. After I became deputy, there were--let's see, what did they call it? I think it was just Community Relations, and they had three detectives or officers in the police department, and they used to go to meetings, community meetings, and report back on them.

Espino

Did you know that they were doing that?

Davis

This was, oh, school meetings. We were going through the desegregation of school. I remember seeing them there. Oh, the police department has always had a spying group on the community.

Espino

Community activists. I was reading somewhat of the Chicano Moratorium, and apparently they had some--and this is Dionicio Morales' autobiography, where he talks about how--oh, no, I think, no, it's Bert Corona, Bert Corona's oral history. He talks about how they found someone who had been infiltrated into the Chicano movement organization and who was asked to instigate something to start a riot.

Davis

Yes. Yes.

Espino

That's really tragic, because a riot did start.

Davis

Yes. Yes.

Espino

And people were really hurt. Were you in attendance at the Chicano Moratorium?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Did you go?

Davis

I was still working for Labor then.

Espino

That was 1970, yes.

Davis

I used to drive a government car, and I remember parking way down the street and then walking to the Moratorium. Gerry's group [Gerry Ledesma], I don't remember, but she was chairman or director of that community group. I know she was there, too, but the children that used to come to her center and play there and participate, they all got together and went to the Moratorium. When they saw me there, they invited me to join them, so I went with them. We went and took a walk, and when they started to come down on us with all the sheriffs and the fire trucks and everything, I remember they were so concerned. These were young kids, but they made sure that I was safe, and they took me and just ran. I remember they came in a van with somebody from the organization, and it was parked at the East L.A. [College] parking lot.

We were trying to get there, and there was this big, high fence, and people were actually climbing the fence, trying to get out of the way.

Davis

Somehow we managed to get to the parking lot, and we got to the van, and they didn't have a key. But that didn't disturb them. One of the young kids got under the hood and connected the wires, and somebody else got behind the wheel. They had pushed me into the van. There were no seats in the van. There was just one folding chair, and they told me to sit down, you know. They got the car started, and I remember somehow they couldn't go around, but there was this piece of wood that they put in front of the parking spaces, and they actually went over those. I fell off the chair, and I just stayed down after that. But they managed to get out of East L.A., and then they come back and took me over to my car. But these were the young people.

Espino

They were teenagers or younger than teenagers?

Davis

Oh, younger than teenagers.

Espino

So you remember when you were marching with them.

Davis

Yes, I marched with them, yes.

Espino

And then all of a sudden you heard something, or how did you know?

Davis

The fire trucks, yes.

Espino

You heard fire trucks.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

How did you know that you had to run?

Davis

They had loudspeakers.

Espino

What were they saying, do you remember?

Davis

We were just trying to get out, and you could see the buses. When we got to the parking lot, right on the street behind there were buses loaded with sheriff's deputies who had come to quell the crowd, I guess.

Espino

Did you see anybody getting hurt, or did you see any of the--

Davis

No, but I mean, the crowd was--we were just arriving at the end, so we were just finishing, and we were jam-packed of people. They kept insisting that we go the other way. There was another lady there, Althea. I don't remember her last name, but she was in charge of the program at USC where they used to hire kids during the summer and put them to work in the county hospital and so on. She was there with her child, and she told me later--I guess they must have used tear gas, because I know she said that they had gone to a house that had a faucet out in the yard, and that she had to wash her child's eyes and hers.

Espino

So people didn't expect this kind of--

Davis

No.

Espino

You wouldn't have brought your child to this if you were expecting that kind of violence. It was a complete surprise to the community members that attended.

Davis

Oh yes. Frightening.

Espino

Were you running with the kids?

Davis

Yes. The kids were dragging me along. I knew enough to wear comfortable shoes.

Espino

How do you think things changed after that? Do you think that it had an impact on people as far as what they were willing to do to win the justice they sought?

Davis

I think that a lot of the people were frightened, but then other people decided that this was a bad way of treating them and they began to exert themselves a little bit more.

Espino

So you think some people were a little nervous and other people, it made them even more.

Davis

More, yes, especially in East L.A. where you have a lot of people who are illegal and so on.

Espino

What would that have to do with it?

Davis

They're afraid of authority, any authority. They don't expect anything good from any of them. Was that the time when Ruben Salazar was shot? Yes. I remember going to Dionicio Morales', me and my boss. I don't know why we went there, but evidently we were still all upset about it, because we were all talking, and I don't know what what was said, but I started to cry, and I remember crying. And I lost one of my eyelashes, and I was going on the floor and looking for it and crying. My boss wanted to come over to help me, and I remember Dionicio Morales saying, "No, let her get over it." Just like at his memorial, just recalling the early years of him, I had real difficulty. I was crying, too.

Espino

I can't imagine what that must have been like, because you had a whole community of people coming together for all these good things, and then you have people hit and beat, and you have someone like Ruben Salazar killed. That must have been traumatic. Did you attend his funeral?

Davis

Yes. Yes, it was held in Hollywood. I think that's a park where there are a lot of celebrities. I remember there was this tremendous line of people who went by his coffin. It was an open coffin. I know that he was hit in the head, but they fixed him up all so he didn't look--

Espino

You remember seeing him?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

He was young, right?

Davis

Yes, very young.

Espino

He was also a very good friend of Dionicio Morales'.

Davis

Yes. Yes, he went out into the community. I know there had been other attempts, because I remember--I think it was at the first anniversary of Ruben Salazar that they had a gathering at Laguna Park. There were not as big a crowd as the other parade, but the gathering was held in the baseball diamond. I remember seeing the family. That had been in the papers about having to carry out the mother from Chavez Ravine when they built the Dodgers Stadium, and they were at Ruben Salazar's memorial. I remember seeing them.

Davis

I got to know them because when they had the problems getting the people out, there were a lot of people going to show their support, and I remember my husband [Raymond Davis] and I, and I had my daughter at that time. We drove up to Chavez Ravine, and I remember we got the idea that we should collect signatures of all the people who are here. So we went to a little community store that was there, and we asked for some butcher paper, and the men wouldn't give it to us. I think we ended up giving him some money for it or something. But we collected names of the people who were coming there on the hood of our car. I don't remember what we did with them now. It was a valuable thing.

Espino

Yes. I wonder what happened to that list.

Davis

Yes. I don't remember what we did with it. We must have given it to somebody who had to do with the decisions, maybe to the city council or something.

Espino

So that would be the Arechiga family--

Davis

Yes.

Espino

--who was the prominent activist family that was pulled out. So you became friends with that family?

Davis

No, I just knew them that one time, and then I'd recognize them and they would recognize me, too.

Espino

That was another episode. That was earlier; that was in the sixties, right?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Yes, prior to the seventies. So part of the Moratorium was looking at the anti-war perspective. Do you remember how you felt about the war in Vietnam at that time?

Davis

I felt we shouldn't be there. We did what we're doing now. We're interfering in another government.

Espino

Do you remember feeling that way from the very beginning, or did you develop that belief?

Davis

No, I think I developed it.

Espino

Over time.

Davis

Yes, because at the beginning everybody is for the war, because it's a war that we're involved in, and then later we decided that they had no business being there.

Espino

Did you know anybody who served in the Vietnam War?

Davis

I must have, I'm sure.

Espino

Seeing that you knew a lot of people who served in World War II. You knew a lot of people who served that war, but Vietnam--

Davis

Yes, that was later.

Espino

Much later. So you didn't have nephews or anything like that that served.

Davis

No, nobody close. I remember when I was with Bradley that they had a parade for veterans of Vietnam, and I remember their coming down Spring Street. There was a review stand, and the general that--I don't remember his name, but he had fought in Vietnam, and he came marching with the men. His wife was sitting next to me. The men had a lot of respect for him. I can't think of his name, but he was someone that was identified with the war. They hadn't been received well, so they were now giving them the reception that they deserved. Bradley didn't go to that, but I guess I represented the mayor's office. It was very moving. Truckloads of veterans. Not very many had uniforms on. They just looked like ordinary people.

Espino

Did you know any veterans that became active in the Chicano movement or some of the later--

Davis

When we were having the election for the city school, we had a meeting somewhere, and I'm trying to think of--it was some way, and I remember that there was a young man, a veteran, who got up and spoke, but I don't

remember that he continued to be active; at least I would say it's so. I think that was the first time I saw any indication in our community that there was people that should be dealt with. We had a lot of veteran activity, but from World War II. What's his name? [Raul Morin, author of Among the Valiant, a book about Hispanic veterans who received the Congressional Medal of Honor] I know there's a memorial on Lorena and--is it 1st Street [Lorena and 1st Street in East L.A.]? But there on Lorena there's a memorial to the veterans, and every year I know they have a service for Memorial Day.

Espino

It was much different, wasn't it, the return of the veterans from World War II and the return of the veterans from Vietnam?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

They weren't received the same.

Davis

No, not at all. I don't know why people would react to them. They didn't want the war, either.

Espino

So then in 1973 this was three years after the Moratorium, you started to work for Bradley in human resources. You left the Department of Labor. Do you remember how that came about?

Davis

When I first went to work for Bradley, I went on a very special arrangement. There was a contract between Labor and Bradley at which the Department of Labor paid for 50 percent of my wages, and the city paid the other 50 percent. So that was a great advantage for Bradley, because he didn't have to pay full-- but later I guess the Labor director was concerned it might be a conflict of interest because they also had a contract with us [the city], and so he decided that they should terminate my contract, and Bradley took me on full-time. I was always full-time, but I mean he paid.

Espino

He was paying your full salary.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

And how did you come to this job again? Did somebody recommend you?

Davis

No, I just knew Bradley, and I think probably there were some people in the Valley that knew me, too, and they probably remember this man named Jack, Jack Berman. He used to call Bradley up all the time. They knew him since he was [a policeman]--and they helped him get elected into the city council. I've always had a feeling that they influenced Bradley or suggested. But he knew me from before.

Espino

So you participated on his campaign?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Both campaigns, the one where he lost and then the second one where he won, or just the latter?

Davis

No, I worked on both campaigns.

Espino

Do you remember what that was like as far as what kind of support you got from the East Los Angeles community?

Davis

I know the second time he ran [when Bradley ran for governor], I remember going around to the different headquarters when they would have a special day for Bradley. They had menudo breakfasts, and that I remember. I was at one of his headquarters, and there were these women, but there were three who obviously were together, and they came over and we were sitting, eating, and they said that they were there to support Bradley because when they were younger, they had several brothers, and that one time they had been somewhere getting into trouble of some kind, but they had run home, and they went to bed, and the father, when they came to the door, Bradley and other officers were at the door and asked about the boys, and the father said that they were asleep; and that the other officers wanted to go in and wake them up and see for themselves, and Bradley--I think he was a sergeant then--told them no, that they should respect the man, that he said his sons was sleeping, and that was good enough for him. The family has always remembered that, and they were there to support him.

Espino

So he made a good impression on them even before he had political ambitions.

Davis

Yes, when he was a cop, yes.

Espino

People liked him. People liked him in the community. So was it hard to get people to support him?

Davis

No.

Espino

Because like today we're looking at the presidential race of Barack Obama, and people talk about how, because he's mixed race--he's African American and white--that some people won't vote for him because he's black.

Davis

Yes, it's ridiculous.

Espino

Did people talk about that same thing back then with Bradley?

Davis

I didn't have any trouble with the Spanish community--Hispanic. My husband had trouble when he went around walking precincts with the children. They would call him "nigger lover" and what have you. So I know he directly--but I don't remember anybody. They were always very polite and listened to what we had to say.

Espino

So you think that the Mexican community, the Mexican American, Mexican community in East Los Angeles, they warmed up to Bradley quickly?

Davis

Yes. I think they did, yes.

Espino

There were some campaigns, Viva Bradley.

Davis

Viva Bradley, yes.

Espino

Do you know who was in charge of that or who was behind that?

Davis

I'm not sure. Maybe--I think it had to be a campaign person, so it wasn't anybody that I knew in staff.

Espino

So it would be somebody from within Bradley's campaign--

Davis

Yes.

Davis

--but who was of Mexican origin.

Davis

Yes. There were a lot of people that were working for him.

Espino

He had a lot of support among the political people on the Eastside. Like Manuel Aragon, who became his first deputy mayor?

Davis

Deputy, yes.

Espino

Was he a known activist on the Eastside before he worked for Bradley?

Davis

Well, like I say, he always, I think, made an effort to gather all the Hispanic people working in government for staff, and he managed to bring us together and lend support and so on. I didn't know him outside of that. [He worked getting Hispanic federal government workers together so we could help.]

Espino

So you wouldn't consider him like a grassroots organizer?

Davis

He probably did on his own--I just didn't belong to his group, so I don't know. But he acted like one does.

Espino

Like a grassroots--

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Do you remember him from before, from the CSO or from--

Davis

No. No.

Espino

Then there was another person who worked for Bradley. His name was [David] Lozano.

Davis

Henry Lozano?

Espino

No. David Lozano. He was a bit younger than yourself at that time.

Davis

David Lozano. I don't remember anybody by that name.

Espino

He was a business consultant. He became an appointee to the Board of Public Works.

Davis

Oh, David Lozano, that's right. He lived in the San Pedro area.

Espino

Yes, exactly.

Davis

Yes. He was very active in his community, and was appointed as a public works commissioner. He was there for I don't remember how many years, but then he just disappeared from the community. I know this one woman who was very active. She was not Hispanic, but she used to care about David, and she said she tried to work with him. But I don't know what had happened to him. He just stopped being an activist.

Espino

That's interesting. So it seems like Bradley made a point of appointing Latinos to his boards and to his--

Davis

Yes, but he still could have done more.

Espino

You think he could have done more.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

In what ways do you think he could have done more?

Davis

Appoint more people. The commissioners used to get together, all the Hispanic commissioners, so I think there were about sixteen. They used to help him with the fundraising, and in the community. I took a number of them to Mexico with me one time when I was invited to go, and I took my father and my son, too.

Espino

So you think he could have done more, to appoint more.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Do you think he could have done more for the Latino community of Los Angeles?

Davis

No. To begin with, he used to go out into the community, a different community each month, and he went to East L.A. quite often, where he would walk the streets and meet businessmen, and meet with groups. He was very good the first term of his office. I think even the second term he was still going out, but not as frequently. Right up to the last, I think he did, but this wasn't as frequently as he used to go before.

Espino

Did he pick up any Spanish when he was out there? Would he use any Spanish?

Davis

I'm sure he did. He understood it.

Espino

He did. He understood Spanish.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Did you ever hear him speak?

Davis

No.

Espino

How would people receive him when he would go out and walk in East Los Angeles?

Davis

Very well, yes.

Espino

Would crowds form, or can you--

Davis

Yes. He was a very impressive person. He was very tall and distinguished looking and so on, and he was always a presence. I remember I had one secretary that, if he called and said it was the mayor, she would sit up straight. He had that effect on people, because later when Richard Riordan became mayor, I remember he could walk into a room and nothing happened.

Espino

That's interesting.

Davis

Yes, and it really reminded me of the presence that he had. He had a lot of suits. I remember one time there was a Korean tailor, and I don't remember what he came to--but he ended up making him suits.

Espino

He had his suits tailor-made.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

That's interesting. So he didn't have a problem then. His race didn't really affect his popularity--

Davis

No.

Espino

--on the Eastside. He was able to build coalitions, do you think?

Davis

Yes, very much. Yes, and even the black community would--they got over--they always thought they should have more, or they thought he was their mayor and could get away with things. He was mayor to everybody.

Espino

So he was also popular on the Westside.

Davis

Yes, very popular.

Espino

With the Jewish community.

Davis

With the Jewish community, yes. Let's see. I don't remember that he ever went to Israel, but when Israel--I'm trying to remember what--it was one of their anniversaries. He had a dinner for the Jewish people. There were a lot of people from the city there in the conference room, and I remember the Jewish people being very supportive of him, and he always managed to do things to ingratiate himself.

Espino

That's interesting. Well, I think we're going to stop here, Grace--

Davis

Oh, okay.

Espino

--and we'll continue next time our conversation about Bradley. Maybe you can think about some of the important things that he did for Los Angeles, for the Latino community, and your role, and exactly some of the responsibilities that you had and how this changed from your previous job with the Department of Labor, what was different. Okay? Thanks.[End of interview]

1.8. Session 8 (October 28, 2008)

Espino

Today is October 28, 2008. This is Virginia Espino, and I'm interviewing Grace Montañez Davis at her home in Highland Park, California.

Espino

Okay, Grace, I wanted to talk a little bit about your experience working with [Tom] Bradley and try to take you up until you left his administration and what you did after that. Some of the questions that I have are about your feelings regarding some of his achievements. What do you think that some of his greatest achievements were while you were working with him?

Davis

I hadn't thought of that for a long time. I know the thing that marked his administration when he first started was his accessibility to the public. He used to every month go out into different communities and actually walk the

streets and meet businesspeople and neighbors and things, and attend meetings and so on; have lunch with them. He did that every month, and every month, too, on another day, he had an open house where people from the community could come in and sign up, and we used to not screen them, but just try to find out what their problem was about. We had a sheet of paper for each person, and we usually wrote that down for the mayor to see when that person went in. He used to become very involved in their problems. Many times he would personally right then and there pick up the phone and call a county supervisor or a judge or an employer or whoever would have some impact on that problem, and that used to impress people quite a bit.

Espino

So this open house was in his office?

Davis

Yes, and his outer office, because when you first go in, there's like a big living room with lots of couches, and in the back is his office with his desk, and he has a private bathroom there. When he works late at night and during the day, he sits in that office. When he receives people, he goes outside [to the outer office].

Espino

How many people would he see in one open house? For example, ten, twenty, five?

Davis

Oh, no, more than that. I know when it got toward the end of the day and there would still be a lot of people there, the deputy mayors would volunteer to see some of the people.

Espino

He would have open house the whole day long?

Davis

Oh yes. He gave that up, I think during his third term, but he would still go out into the community. But he decided too many crazies were coming.

Espino

Oh, really. Like do you have a memory of one specific incident?

Davis

Well, there were people that had illusions of what they were trying to contact an agency for. I'm trying to remember one man that I saw. I think he was writing his biography. He had tons of paper in a paper bag, and I don't remember, but it had something to do with that whoever he was addressing this document to was not realistic. But you had a lot of people imagining things.

Espino

Is there any specific person that you recall coming in and actually he did some important work for him or her?

Davis

I don't remember the specifics, but we wouldn't know because the people that was coming, he would meet them all. So when they came out, they would tell us, "Gee, he called the supervisor," or, "He called the governor of California."

Espino

So he met alone with them.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

That's very interesting. And people would come all day long.

Davis

The guard was always there, though. The policeman who drove him was sitting outside the office.

Espino

That's interesting. So his public relations, you think, was one of his assets?

Davis

Yes, and he had coordinators in the various communities, and they helped during that day in getting the people through the paperwork, and getting them in to see him. So we worked with him all day.

Espino

There's a lot that's been written about his role in the Olympics and bringing the Olympics to Los Angeles. Do you think that was an important achievement?

Davis

Yes, he was very involved in that and made several trips to places where he would get commitments of things that would be produced for the Olympics. I don't know where he got Peter Ueberroth, but that man was a fantastic organizer. He was also very available to people. I remember going to different receptions that were held, either for a sport or the leaders. Each sport had a commissioner. He assigned a commissioner for each sport, and then there were envoys under the commissioner, who, when the people came from the countries, the envoys were assigned to this particular team of athletics. They came with coaches and different personnel that serviced the team, and the envoy was responsible for communicating between the Olympics staff and them.

Davis

I was the envoy originally for Cuba, but then when Cuba didn't come, I got Guatemala and Nicaragua [El Salvador]. They were the ones--I think was it Nicaragua [it was El Salvador]--

Espino

I'm just going to pause it because there's a really loud trash can outside.[Recorder turned off.]

Espino

Okay, you were saying about--

Davis

They had a baseball team, and I don't remember what sport the Guatemala-- but they were much more advanced. They were neighbors. For instance, it was funny when, at the very beginning of their stay, we had a raising of the flag of the country where these teams came. Every day there were different countries. Well, Nicaragua asked us not to be done at the same time as Guatemala, because they looked on them as differently than their country and so on.

Espino

That's interesting.

Davis

Yes. But I worked with them every day. Mostly the El Salvador people had errands to do in the city. One of the staff members, one of the coaches, I think, had--I'm trying to remember--an automobile. It was either a Mustang or something like that, and we took him around the city to where he could buy parts for that automobile; and they had other places to go. There was something at the Friendship Auditorium there on Riverside, and it was kind of a political thing for them. But the players themselves were very, very gentle and very common, and they appreciated anything you did for them.

Espino

Do you think that was an important thing to do for the city, or do you think the money was well spent, or do you think that it could have gone to other programs that--

Davis

I think it was a very well structured event. The money came mostly from the sponsors, the corporate sponsors. They built different stadiums and the tracks, the swimming pools, so the city didn't have to pay that much. I lived in the [Olympics] Village for the two weeks that they were here, at UCLA, but I used to sometimes come home. But mostly I stayed there. We slept in the dorms.

Espino

Do you think that Bradley had a lot of support from the different supervisors and the other L.A. officials?

Davis

Oh yes. Everybody was very happy to have the Olympics here. It was an event that brought people together. There weren't any differences. We were all working for the Olympics. I know there were many meetings with Peter Ueberroth before the Olympics, people who were going to be envoys and have other functions in the Olympics. We met almost every week, and they instructed us or gave us knowledge of different things, events that were going on. So we really worked to get the Olympics and make them successful, and, of course, Ueberroth's staff, who worked with the corporate sponsors and things.

Espino

Because L.A. is such a big city, so it's interesting how--you know, you have such a diverse community with the Westside and South Central and the Eastside and Northeast.

Davis

But, for instance, the commissioner [Danny Villanueva] who handled the boxing events was--I forget his name now--the director of the Mexican television station. I can't think of his name, but he was very knowledgeable about the community and surrounded himself with people from the community. I know my son [Alfred] served as an intern for the two weeks with him, because he's an amateur boxer and he teaches boxing and things, so he was very knowledgeable. That was the time that Oscar de la Hoya fought during the Olympics and won the Olympic medal for that sport.

Espino

In '84 in Los Angeles.

Davis

Yes. I'm trying to think of other commissioners. There were just a lot of community people involved. They had a very democratic way of distributing the tickets so people were more or less satisfied. I know I got track and--I guess I got the track and field tickets. I got to go to the baseball games because I went with my team because they were playing.

Espino

So that was one of his big achievements.

Davis

I think his main--yes.

Espino

And then I was reading another piece about him and his role in diversifying the different commissions. Do you remember that?

Davis

I served on the group that picked out people to recommend. He did the actually selecting, but the people who sat on the committee actually reviewed resumes of people that were applying or somebody had recommended. I forget how often we met, but when we got through, we just submitted the list of actual people that were recommended, and he chose people from this list. So by having people on the committee that were very representative of the communities, they were able to endorse or recommend very community-minded people. So the Hispanics, I know we had more than sixteen commissioners. They used to meet every once in a while and just strategize how they were handling their departments. The black commissioners also met. He used to have meetings of commissioners, social meetings, in the Getty House, usually on either a Saturday or a Sunday, and all the commissioners were invited for an afternoon, with cocktails or tea. So they were exposed to each other quite a bit.

Espino

So the commissions were really diverse in the seventies, and it seems that people who were active in grassroots, community-type organizations now moved into more mainstream, you know, with someone like Bradley appointing them, like yourself, for example. Do you think that it made a huge difference, having those people?

Davis

Oh yes, very much, especially when you got people who already had experience of leadership. They always spoke up and took a very active role in the commissions.

Espino

Were there conflicts between groups, do you remember?

Davis

No, not really.

Espino

Because it seems like it was so diverse. You know, you had Jewish people and African American, Asian.

Davis

No, they were all for Bradley, and that kept them united.

Espino

And your role in the beginning was that you were invited to meetings, you gave speeches, but do you remember anything that you feel like was really important?

Davis

When I first came to work for him, I was under a Interpersonnel Act assignment, which the Department of Labor paid half and he paid half of my salary. That way, at the time--I don't know if they still do it, but the federal and state government had people at the local level helping each other out. My supervisors in Labor were the ones who decided that it was getting to be a conflict of interest, my overlooking the grant [to the city] that was made from the Department of Labor to the city and working for Labor at the same time. So they decided to terminate the agreement--so I think I went for a year.

Davis

From the beginning from that time, the principal thing that I did was to oversee the grants that the government, either the Department of Labor or Health and Education, senior citizens, the aging department. I forget what it was, the peace--they were volunteers, and we got a grant from them, too. So I oversaw first the seeking of the grants to make sure that the proposals were all okay according to what the government wanted, and then when they actually made the award, I would oversee the departments or group that were

implementing the grants. The first couple of years when I first sat on the Grants Committee, the Council Grants Committee, I had a vote. There were three councilmen, the CAO [City Administrative Officer], and myself, and both the CAO and myself had votes. We voted with council about granting the grants. Then if we approved them, then they were sent to whatever agency would do the funding. That went on for several years, and I think then the council decided to redo some of the council committees, and the Grants Committee was reorganized, and the both the CAO and I could still sit on the committee, but we didn't have a vote.

Espino

How did you feel about that?

Davis

Oh, that was okay. I got to speak. Councilman Art Snyder also sat on that committee, and Ray--not Ray. I think Cunningham was his last name, the councilman, the black councilman [Davis S. Cunningham Jr.]. Both of them were very supportive of me and would make sure that I spoke or gave my opinion when it was needed and so on. So I became very close to Snyder and also Cunningham and also Bob Farrell. In fact, Bob Farrell and myself went to Germany one time, representing the city when they had a conference of city mayors or city managers; they were all city officials. They had both Councilman Farrell and myself address them about different departments. I had Planning and Transportation, I think. He had the arts, which was interesting. I don't remember what other department he had, but we both spent the time together of doing that.

Davis

I went one other time to Germany at the invitation of the immigration commissioner of Germany. They invited about six or eight different citizens from south California. There were people that were involved at the university level and like me at my level, attorneys who work in immigration and so on. They were having problems with the Turkish immigrants. Five years before that they had imported Turkish workers to come and work in Germany, because they had a labor shortage. What happened was that they got married, which they didn't like, and they told you this, very frank about it.

They had children, who then went to school in their schools, and they created special schools for them. They claimed that they put their students back in their education, and that's why they should be addressed separately.

Davis

I remember going to a Turkish home, visiting. One of the officials there wanted me to see the home. The women were very subservient to the men. I know that it was the men who were meeting with me, and the women stayed in the kitchen. And it was the men who decided if they should get divorced, not the women.

Espino

I'm going to pause it for a second because there's a loud trash truck outside.[Recorder turned off.]

Espino

Okay, it seems like the truck has passed. You were talking about the Turkish immigrants in Germany.

Davis

It was interesting. The Turks, there were a lot of activists. They seemed to be well organized. They were recommending to the commissioner that they wanted laws like the ones we had, and we explained that that wasn't possible, that it would depend on the type of government they had.

Espino

So you had some experience with immigrants in Los Angeles to give them in Germany with their immigrant population.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

So then we talked a little bit about some of Bradley's greatest achievements. Do you have any memories of some of the most important things that you did while you worked for Bradley?

Davis

I think he addressed the homeless problem. Many organizations in the community were already involved, but the government hadn't responded, really. His first response was to open up the city council chambers and house the homeless there. I don't know how many were in agreement with this, but it turned out not to be the best experience. We had the homeless, although there were guards who were on duty, kept them from going into city hall, but some of them managed to get into, for instance, on one side there were council offices, and they got in there and urinated, disturbed things. When we had them using the kitchens down below--I didn't realize there was a kitchen, but there was a kitchen for the guards and I guess some of the staff downstairs, and they used the kitchen to cook their breakfast the next day and so on. I don't remember how many days, but it wasn't very long. We had to stop that.

Davis

One of the other deputies--or the other deputy [Mike Gage]--came up with the idea of making available land that was near downtown that was owned by the railroads, and he negotiated with the railroad people, and then Bradley announced that they were going to open a homeless camp out there in conjunction with the railroad people. The other deputy just was involved with the preliminaries. I became involved because I was already involved within the homeless issue under one of the community departments that handles that problem. So when they started, we organized a steering committee of the homeless to run the camp, and we had staff from the community development department that received the grants. They and staff--they probably went over more often, but I went every week, and we had a meeting with the steering committee and went over whatever rules the city had imposed on the camp and so on.

Davis

Later on we had the Salvation Army come in and run the camp, and they provided meals and so on, too. They did a tremendous job, and they never really got the recognition from this city, but they should. I'm not sure if it was the Salvation Army--I think it was, or the Red Cross--but we managed to get cots for them [the homeless] to sleep on, and the guards in the camp found at

night the homeless were taking the cots and putting them over the fence and giving them to somebody else who would go sell them. So I guess we just had whatever cots there were, but Ted [Hayes]--I forget Ted's--there was this leader, Ted, of the homeless.

Espino

Yes, I remember him.

Davis

He set up these permanent little huts. They looked like igloos. They lived within the camp. He brought his wife from Riverside, and I'm not sure; I think he had his children there, too.

Espino

This was in the eighties, the late eighties?

Davis

Yes. We had to deal with him [Ted Hayes] and then again with the steering committee, so there were a lot of conflicts. One time the staff of the city organized an event where we got a lot of volunteer doctors, and we had trailers moved in and set up a dental seat, a gynecology examining room, and then general practitioners. It was an all-day thing, but you got a certain amount of homeless who took advantage of that. Also, the county hospital participated in that, and if they needed medication or follow-up exams, they were referred to the county hospital. They were given medicine that the doctor had prescribed. But not everybody in the camp went to that for examination. We had people who definitely had medical problems, and we finally talked a lot of them to go and get exams; pregnant ladies who had never seen a doctor and so on.

Davis

It really was disappointing that we didn't get everybody through that.

Espino

So he put, his administration, at one point a lot of energy into dealing with the homeless. Do you think that you spent months where that issue was the one issue you were dealing with?

Davis

Oh yes. I always felt, with the grants and so on that--another thing we did in the eighties or right near '80, I was friends with one of the vice presidents [Jay Rodriguez] of NBC Television, and I don't know where the idea came from; I guess from him. He decided to do an event that would highlight the census and get more people to respond to it, because they were always lacking in that. We had a kickoff meeting that the mayor attended. It was at NBC Studios in Burbank, and they outlined this program that they had for reaching out to people about the census and how to educate or inform the census people in ways of reaching more people.

Davis

I had meetings in city hall with the different departments, and, like for instance, the water meter people were asked to report houses that were behind the house in front that the census would only be aware of the front house and not the house in the back, in the garage. So they came back to the city with all of these dwellings that they didn't know about before. The gas meter, though that's not a city function but the Southern California Gas people, and to do the same. I'm trying to think of the--we had so many things going on.

Davis

NBC made a logo for the event and produced videos and things that other stations, whether they were English-speaking or Spanish-speaking, could take and use in their broadcasts all the time until it came time for the census. There were a lot of written materials. We met with the census people. We helped them to identify the homeless. It was a tremendous thing. We went on and on for weeks, doing this, and I headed that up for the mayor.

Espino

I remember, that was a huge, important endeavor, to make sure that people were counted. So the homeless issue was even before the eighties then. And when the Olympics came, was that a problem for the mayor and for the homeless?

Davis

We tried not to make them conspicuous. I know that we were criticized for that, but we didn't want the city--the traffic was tremendous. I don't know if people just didn't drive or they went away for the summer or something. I know the first day for the opening ceremony we went on the freeway. I went with El Salvador's Olympic baseball team, and the exits and the entrances to the freeway were all blocked off. There were police guards at each of them, and there would be maybe one or two cars sitting there. But we had free range to go on the freeway to the coliseum. The traffic was just--everybody cooperated. It was fantastic.

Espino

So you were going to say something about you tried to make the homeless not conspicuous. Did you relocate them?

Davis

We didn't relocate them. I don't remember. I think we still had the camp in those days. We just wanted them to stay in the camp or something.

Espino

Did they? I can't remember his last name--Ted. Was he an issue for the mayor's administration, or how did they relate to each other?

Davis

The mayor used to meet with Ted [Hayes] a lot, even outside of his community meetings. I remember later on they were suing the city. I don't remember why, but I know that I was deposed, and Ted and his lawyer came to my office to interview me, and with them came his wife and another woman. I don't remember what role she played, but I refused to be interviewed in front of the women, because I said I didn't want them to go around with propaganda for or against, taking what I said and so on. But I had a city lawyer there, and she said I had the right to do that.

Espino

That's interesting.

Davis

I had a good relationship with Ted. Many times when he didn't get to see the mayor, he would come see me, and I visited his village and other homeless events. I was very responsive to that. When they closed the camp down, I remember--when they opened the camp, they asked the city for a city flag to fly over the camp with the American flag, so we gave them one. Well, at the end when they were closing the camp, the homeless took the city flag and presented it to me. That's how good a friend I was.

Espino

To the group. That's really nice. Do you still have that flag?

Davis

I think so. Somewhere around here I must have it. I'll have to look for it.

Espino

Why did they close down the camp, from your perspective as someone who was on the inside?

Davis

I don't remember exactly, but it deteriorated. They were doing drugs and things. There was no rehabilitation of them or anything. We weren't solving the homeless problem. We did so much for them, like I told you we had the Salvation Army feeding them, and they had cots, and they have canvas over the top so they could have some shelter. I went to Phoenix, Arizona, to visit the poverty program there that was managing the homeless there, and they had opened up a camp, and so I went to see if it was something that we could copy or something. Well, it was just a small, one-block area, no shelter, no cots, no food. It was just a place for them to hang out, and it's hot in Phoenix. I remember it was over a hundred the day I was there, and yet they were doing a service; they thought they were.

Espino

Yes, it sounds like yours was much, much more thought out as far as all the different needs. What about bathing and bathrooms?

Davis

They had showers. They had a trailer with showers.

Espino

At the camp in Los Angeles.

Davis

Yes. Yes. They had trouble with those, too. They got clogged up or destroyed or something.

Espino

So eventually the people that started to live there were homeless for other reasons.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Not just because they couldn't find a job.

Davis

No. With the Salvation Army we tried to rehabilitate the homeless. They would take them and they had clothing, so they would take them to where the clothes were and outfit them so that they would be presentable when they went to seek work. I remember one couple that had been selling flowers that they would pick up from the trash to help themselves. So the Salvation Army--I think the Marriott Hotel had offered us the opportunity of sending trainees through their hotel, of the homeless. So we would dress them all up and everything, give them tokens for bus fare, because the Marriott was way over by the airport, and they packed a lunch for them. The man supposedly qualified to go to the Marriott Hotel, well, he didn't work more than one or two days. They were back on the street, selling flowers. They liked the freedom of doing things themselves.

Davis

I don't know how many more cases they have like that. It just didn't--trying to do something with them. We had a lot of mental cases. I know the county actually went out in the street trying to identify people who needed help, and they weren't successful, either.

Espino

How did Ted feel about the closing of the camp? Was that his idea?

Davis

Well, he had his own village by then.

Espino

A different place.

Davis

Yes, downtown.

Espino

Oh, so you're not talking about the camp that had the domes.

Davis

Yes, that one. He started that when we had the camp. He got several of them and he put them in the camp.

Espino

Okay, but is that the one that closed eventually?

Davis

No, the whole camp closed. The whole property was taken back by the railroad.

Espino

Okay, so the place that just had the canvas shelter.

Davis

Both our camp and then Ted's camp were on the same location. Well, they all had to get out.

Espino

Oh, okay. That whole thing closed.

Davis

Yes, but Ted moved into downtown in the alleys between the buildings and stuff.

Espino

Another camp.

Davis

Yes. But it was the same village.

Espino

Do you know what's happened to him? I have not heard anything about him.

Davis

I don't know if he's still there.

Espino

What he's doing. He was in the newspaper a lot.

Davis

The last time I heard, which was not too long ago, he was still there in the camp.

Espino

He was still there.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

So I wanted to ask you also about some of your important work. So you talked about the census, that you were in charge of making sure that the publicity and the people understood that they needed to participate, and then you also worked with the homeless and getting them services, needed services and a place to live and rehabilitation. Is there anything else that you feel like you made a significant contribution to?

Davis

Oh, just working with the grants was a full-time job, too.

Espino

Oh, with the grants.

Davis

Yes, and about the same time--there is a Social Security Commission that the Congress appoints every four years, and they review the Social Security Act and make recommendations to the Congress. I was appointed by the Congress. I don't remember who would have possibly given my name, but Esteban Torres, and [Edward] Roybal was there, too. I think he was there, yes. But anyway, I got appointed to it.

Davis

There were just, I think, twelve of us. There were, I think, about four women. One of the women that was appointed had been appointed by [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt to the very first commission, and her name was Edith. I don't remember her name. I guess there were just three, because the other woman was a Republican and a lawyer. This was, I guess, during [Jimmy] Carter's administration. There was a woman that was the head of the Women's Commission, [Sarah] Weddington, I think her name was, and one time she invited the women on the commission to go and have breakfast with her so that she could help us identify any issues that we didn't know about and work it into whatever we were doing for Social Security. Well, the Republican didn't go, and Miss Weddington picked up Ethel and myself, and she took us to the White House, and we had breakfast in their dining room. I remember she drove through the Pentagon. They have a tunnel that goes underneath that to get to the White House. That was quite an experience.

Davis

The woman, she was really still very active, as old as she was. I remember later after we finished serving there--I guess we only served about a year. I used to have a copy of the [social security] report of the commission to the Congress, and I'm going to ask the Chicano studies if they--I put it in with my materials, because that was something national that I did.

Davis

I also served the California Library Commission. This was a commission in California that the library reviewed, I guess, different things about the library and the community, and I represented Bradley to that, too, and I used to go to Sacramento. But I don't know what happened. I guess it just stopped meeting or something. But I enjoyed going to that.

Davis

I also sat on--the Superintendent of Schools had different advisory groups of the different ethnic groups, and I sat on the Latino group. That was a very good experience. There were people from all up and down the state, mostly educators and leaders of the community. One thing that I regretted was that they were very interested when Bradley was running for governor. They wanted to see him elected, and they offered to convene a meeting of people in their community from all over the state; whether that would have taken one meeting or two meetings, but they offered to do that. I told Bradley, and nothing ever came of it. That would have been a real thing for getting the Chicanos behind him more than they were.

Espino

That was when he was running against [George] Deukmejian?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

And that's when they coined that term, the Bradley effect.

Davis

Effect, yes.

Espino

It wasn't when he ran against [Sam] Yorty. It was when he ran against Deukmejian.

Davis

No, Deukmejian. Yes.

Espino

That's interesting. Do you think he really wanted to be governor?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

He put all his effort into that race?

Davis

Yes, he did. I remember the MAPA [Mexican American Political Association] endorsing convention. It was up in Fresno, but Deukmejian was very well organized, so there were a lot of people for Deukmejian. Not necessarily from MAPA, but they brought people, and they had straw hats and--

Espino

At the MAPA convention?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

There were people who weren't backers.

Davis

They were for Deukmejian.

Espino

They were Latinos then, Chicanos.

Davis

Yes, and I remember going to the MAPA people, trying to make sure and counting the people who we got committed to Bradley.

Espino

Why do you think Deukmejian was popular amongst some of the Latinos?

Davis

I don't know. The Turks have a--I didn't really know this much, but my daughter's husband has written, I guess a--I don't know if it's a screenplay or something, about the Turkish what is it? What do you call it when you die--the genocide. He went before the Turkish community and they picked somebody else, but he came in second, I remember. But from him I've learned that there was a lot of suffering by the Turks. So I don't know if they communicate this to Hispanics or what.

Espino

Maybe.

Davis

Yes. And to me, they look Hispanic. I remember the time that I went to Germany to talk about immigration. I was by myself, and there was a stopover in New York. I remember that there was all these people waiting to get on the plane, and I thought they were Chicanos, but they weren't. As soon as I heard them talking, I could tell they weren't. But they looked like Chicano immigrants.

Espino

So you think that possibly his appearance was appealing to the Latino community, because he looked--did he look Latin? He didn't really look Latin.

Davis

He could.

Espino

Do you think so? I guess, yes. That's interesting. So was there a somber mood after Bradley lost?

Davis

Yes.

Espino

And then you were going to tell me about how in the nineties you resigned, or you were asked to resign your position. Are you going to tell me about that?

Davis

Yes. The other deputy, Mike Gage, was going to leave Bradley's administration at that point, and he also made the suggestion that I should be replaced by someone who was more business oriented, who could participate in some of the things that his office did. So Bradley went along with him. I remember I was sitting in my office with two Latinos. I don't remember if they represented the press or not. Not the press; probably some organization. But I got a call from one of the coordinating administrators who had worked in the Hispanic community, and he asked me if Bradley had talked to me. I said no, and I don't know; he said something else and hung up.

Davis

Well, a few minutes later Bradley calls me and asked me to come in. So I told the people to excuse me, and I went in there [to his office], and he told me that he was going to have to let me go. I tried to ask him why, and he really couldn't tell me. I mentioned I think we had the other deputy [Mike Gage] was chief of staff, and I think he had evaluated the staff. So I asked him if my evaluation had something wrong with it, and he said, "Well, I hadn't thought of that, but no," or something. I tried to think of something else, but he said no. I think I asked him if I could stay on in some other position or something, and he said no.

Davis

So I went back to my office, and it was really unbelievable. I couldn't understand. It was quite a shock. And these people were the first to know. I don't know. The mayor had a press conference [to announce the new change], and I remember I was able to get into a suit. I had lost weight, and I went in to see him to ask him how did I look, was I ready for the news conference. Well, when I walked in, he just shook the newspaper at me. He was all upset and angry. I said, "What's the matter?"

Davis

There was an article in the paper--I think it was all about the other deputy telling all the good things he did and everything. Then there was a quote of me. I don't remember what I said, but he didn't like it, whatever I said about being removed or something. So I went into the conference on the negative side, just feeling very bad. Well, there were a whole bunch of people there for me, and I remember--I think this man worked at UCLA, but I can't think of his name right now. He has died. I think he had cancer afterwards. But he asked Bradley who was going to take care of the people when I wasn't there, and Bradley gave him some answer or something.

Davis

It was so funny, because the seats in the front were for the press, and the people who were there had to stand up in the back. But these people who were there to support me were all sitting up in front, and I thought maybe they were going to ask them to move, but they didn't.

Espino

So this was a press conference where you talk about leaving?

Davis

No, they left me to the end. They introduce the new woman who's going to take my place and the new man who was taking--actually, the guy who came in was already on staff, but he hadn't been there that long. What happened, the first person that he had decided to appoint in my place--I can't think of her name, but she was a commissioner [airport commissioner]. Again, I don't remember; one of the smaller departments. When anybody was going to be considered for a commission, their resume went to a woman in the other--she didn't really report except to the mayor. Fran Savage was her name, and she reviewed the resume and got the police to do an investigation of the person before she would recommend them for the mayor.

Davis

Well, they discovered that she had, I guess or her son had, you know, the license, the little tag that you have for the year. I don't remember exactly what. She had either taken her tag and used it for him, or they hadn't used a tag. Anyway, there was a report on it in the police, and so Fran Savage

rejected her. Well, it had to be announced, and they were blaming me for bringing this up. I said, "I don't have anything to do with the appointments. This other woman does," but they wouldn't accept the fact.

Davis

So then they went ahead and appointed another woman, who was a businesswoman. She runs the restaurant that used to be a fire station in downtown, and I've met her when she first came here from New Mexico. She opened up a restaurant in West L.A., and I remember once going to meet her to eat at the restaurant. She showed me the pot where she used to cook the beans, and I remember looking for a pot everywhere and couldn't find it. I think I finally found one at Laurie's, and I bought it. I still have it to cook beans the way she did.

Davis

But she was very nice. I knew that she had nothing against me or anything. So they introduced her and the other guy. At the very end they finally introduced me. But I don't remember how it happened, but somehow he [Bradley] ended up giving me a position as a administrative assistant. He had a vacancy. There was a man at the same level, because there are four people at the same executive level. Two of them are deputies, and the other two are executive assistants. Well, there was one man [Fred Schnell] who was an executive assistant. He was a corporate president of one of the oil companies [Union Oil], and when he first came to work for the mayor, he worked for two dollars a year because he was receiving his pension from the corporation. Then later they put him as executive assistant, so he was making as much money as I was.

Davis

So I asked the mayor if he couldn't put the man back on the two dollars thing, and then I could be hired under him. "Oh, no," and that was unthinkable. I worked, oh, less than a month as an administrative assistant. They gave me a few things to do. I remember we had an Indian representative, and it was a vacancy at that time, and so I had to review resumes to recommend who should be hired. I did that, and I remember they hired somebody else anyway.

Davis

I just remember there was something else in the paper. I used to answer the phone, and I couldn't tell when it was the press or not. I don't remember what it was, but again I got quoted on the paper, and Bradley was upset about it. I know my son [Alfred Davis] was after me to resign. He didn't think I needed the further humiliation or anything. So I just quit.

Davis

But later, months later, there was an L.A. Times reporter [John Schwada] who worked the Los Angeles area and then had been sent to Washington, D.C. Then he came back just to do a special article on Bradley for the L.A. Times Sunday Magazine. Well, he called me. I knew him, and he called me and told me that he was going to do this special article on Bradley. And he said, "I just want you to know that I asked him why he had fired you, and he couldn't tell me. He never told me."

Davis

I remember, because Bradley, he used to respond to UCLA, and they had a ceremony where you received an award of excellence either in corporate, community, technical, and so on. I had received the award years before, and they asked me if I would give the award to one of the persons. I said yes, and I went, and I was sitting there when up comes Bradley, who had also been invited to the ceremony. He had to cross in front of me to sit down. Well, he turned as though nothing had ever happened and shook my hand, and I wasn't about to make a scene or anything.

Davis

Then at the Hollywood Bowl, the Mariachi Festival, I remember being at the festival, because I know the woman [Rodri J. Rodriguez] who produces that event, and she's very gracious about always giving me good tickets. He shows up; was walking up and down the aisles and talking, greeting the people and everything. And I remember that I got up and I went over to where he was and said hello, and the woman that he was with [Marilyn Singer] was a good friend of mine, too, and she's always worked for Bradley. In fact, when he died, he was living with her. Nobody knows about it. He left his wife. I went to his funeral.

Davis

He was a good friend. He always treated me with such respect. I remember one time when I went to Mexico with MAOF [Mexican American Opportunity Foundation], the man who represented the Hispanic community in his office-- Bradley was going for some other reason to Mexico City. Then he got him to fly over. We were in Guanajuato, and he got Bradley to come over to meet with MAOF, and he spent the day and night with us. I remember we went out at nighttime. They have this custom that they have in Spain of the students all dressed up in Spaniard costumes, and they go all over the street, singing and all, and he went with us all over at nighttime. But if there was a step on the street, he would take my elbow and help me up. He always treated me very well.

Espino

He was a gentleman.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Wow. So did you ever find out why you were fired or what did you think?

Davis

I'm sure that the other deputy was the one who insisted, because he never related to me. He wouldn't invite me to the staff meetings.

Espino

The other deputy.

Davis

The other deputy. He wouldn't invite the other executive assistants, either. One of them was black.

Espino

Why do you think that you didn't relate to him? What were your points of disagreement?

Davis

I don't know.

Espino

It seems like the city had changed by the nineties, and the issues that were important when you started in the seventies--

Davis

Yes, it was this deputy.

Espino

--had changed, and they wanted to focus on different things, possibly.

Davis

Yes, because the [deputy] deputy who was there was Maury Weiner, and he was an old friend of mine. In fact, I'm sure he had something to do, besides other people, for appointing me, and we got along just famously. We used to have staff meetings with Bradley, and the two of us would be there in the morning all the time. He was the one that was arrested by the police for--I think they accused him of touching a policeman in the theater or something. Anyway, he had to resign. They had a trial, but everything was stacked against him. We used to have meetings at night at a friend in the Valley's house.[Telephone rings.]

Espino

Okay, I'm going to pause it.[Recorder turned off.]

Davis

--who followed him. I can't think of his name. He was a Republican [Ray Remy], and yet we got along fine. I had meetings with the mayor and him and all that. The third guy was, I think, somebody that he recommended or that somebody else--but he was okay, too. It was just this last man. He lives right here on Avenue 59. His house is the one that has the Victorian tower.

Espino

The person who had you fired.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

You don't want to say his name?

Davis

Mike Gage. Yes.

Espino

And you never confronted him about it?

Davis

No. No, he had a horrible temper. I remember onetime one staff member didn't satisfy him, whatever he had asked him to do, and he came out in the hall and was screaming and hollering, cussing him out. At staff meetings--I finally talked to the mayor enough about not going to staff meetings, so he relented and let me go. But there was nothing for me to do but listen.[Recorder turned off.]

Espino

You were talking about his temper.

Davis

Yes, and at the staff meetings if somebody said something he didn't like, he used to bang the table and cuss them out. Very unprofessional.

Espino

Do you think that you had a political disagreement with him, or that you had a personal or--

Davis

Well, like he took over the homeless for getting that site, but he really didn't have anything to do with what I did.

Espino

You don't have any sense of why he thought you should be replaced.

Davis

Just that I never related to him, anyway, from the beginning.

Espino

You didn't agree on things.

Davis

No, there wasn't even that occasion to disagree.

Espino

Oh, okay. I misunderstood you. When you said you didn't relate to him, you mean you didn't have any contact with him.

Davis

Nothing. He was across the hall and I was there.

Espino

I see. So then after you retired, or you quit, you resigned, because you weren't really fired. Officially, you weren't fired. That didn't happen.

Davis

No. Just that somebody was appointed. When I was still there, because he told me about it early in December and I was to stay there till the end of December, Councilman [Robert C.] Farrell initiated a certificate of I forget what they call it [a commendation].

Espino

Appreciation?

Davis

Yes. They was going to present that to me in council, and the man who makes these, the department, automatically gives it to Bradley to sign. I remember I was feeling so bad, and they called me and told me that they were going to have the mayor sign--and I said no, I didn't want it, so his name is not on the commendation.

Espino

You were upset.

Davis

Yes, and Councilman Farrell was the one--they had a ceremony in city council chambers, and they all got up and spoke, and my children were there. In fact, one of the staff members for the community development department took the [commendation] certificate and had it framed for me.

Espino

So were there a lot of people--

Davis

Oh yes, there were a lot of people from city hall.

Espino

But I mean that were upset that this happened?

Davis

Yes. They couldn't see why, and Farrell told me that, too.

Espino

Did you work after that?[Telephone rings.]

Espino

I think we're going to stop it right here, Grace, since the phone's ringing. Okay, thank you. We'll talk again next time.[End of interview]

1.9. Session 9 (November 10, 2008)

Espino

This is Virginia Espino, and today is November 10, 2008. I'm interviewing Grace Montañez Davis at her home in Highland Park, Los Angeles, California.

Espino

Okay, Grace, last time we left off with your resignation from Tom Bradley's administration, and I wanted to ask you, after that what did you do? Did you

have any other agencies approaching you, or did you need some time just to figure out where to go next?

Davis

I didn't take any time. I volunteered for the Volunteer Nurses of America, I believe. The volunteer coordinator was Barbara Balky [phonetic]. For the first couple of years I used to go out with a nurse over in the South Central area, and we visited Spanish-speaking people who had cancer. I used to interpret for her. I would go to the office and I would join her, leave my car there. We would go in her car and visit all kinds, and mostly they were undocumented people and people from other countries, South America and so on. I did a lot of volunteer that way.

Davis

Then they moved the office to Burbank, and I continued to serve, but I didn't go out with anybody. I went out by myself to visit people and provide anything that I could. Mainly it was just "How are you?" and "Is there anything we can do?" I had one gentleman on the Eastside of Los Angeles who I used to go and pray the rosary with him. He didn't have cancer or anything; he just was old and so on. I know there was just a young boy, one of his grandchilds, who was taking care of him. The mother worked for a doctor and came home at night. There were just other people. There was another man who, again, was old, and I went to visit him way on the Eastside. I remember, he was so funny. He wanted to still be active, and he used to get all dressed up and go to the corner store to buy a lottery ticket. I know his son used to visit him quite often.

Davis

Then I believe I--I don't know if I had the stroke or what, but I switched over to just calling people and asking how they were and if there was anything. But that was a very depressing job. I remember one man who was diabetic, and he couldn't afford to eat the food that would be good for him. I would call, and it was just helpless completely. He was still suffering from diabetic, and it just got too depressing for me, and I gave that up.

Davis

Then I went to volunteer at the county hospital [Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center]. I used to go and make phone calls for them. They were trying to get people to come in and be tested for diabetic, and I would just go through the list of people that they had. I guess they had been patients in the hospital. We were way up on the nineteenth floor. I would just call and arrange for them to come in and become a part of the project, and they would be coming in and meeting with the doctor and be tested and all that.

Davis

I used to eat there at the cafeteria, but I remember when I used to go up to the nineteenth floor, that the elevator was just packed with people, just jam-packed with people, and I guess these were people who were sick and what have you, but I got pneumonia and I had to go to the hospital. I was there I don't remember how many days, but I decided that I just wouldn't be going back to the hospital and so on. Actually, my leg has gotten number and so on, so it's more difficult, and I gave up driving after my second stroke, so I couldn't really go out anymore and telephoning was too depressing.

Espino

How old were you when you resigned from Bradley? Do you remember your age?

Davis

1990. I don't remember how old I would have been. I was born in 1926.

Espino

Then you had your stroke. Do you remember how old--

Davis

I had a stroke in '93.

Espino

Okay, three years later.

Davis

And then I had a stroke in '99.

Espino

Okay, so after you resigned, you pretty much volunteered.

Davis

Volunteered, yes, and I was still driving, so I was able to go out.

Espino

You didn't take on another job.

Davis

No. I just retired. My children wanted me to retire. They said that it was too humiliating to be around. Yes.

Espino

Did you still--because you had described earlier, in earlier interviews, the three "holy terrors," I think you called yourselves. Did you still see those women, Gerry Zapata and Lilia [Aceves]?

Davis

I saw them just yesterday.

Espino

But after you resigned from--

Davis

Yes, well, I see them at social events. Yesterday I went to a baby shower for Lilia's granddaughter, who happens to be the half-daughter to my granddaughter. So she's grandmother to the same family, only a different person, and I'm grandmother to the other daughter. Gerry always gets invited to every event, so she was there at Lilia's house yesterday. I told them you would be calling them.

Espino

Yes. I have sent a letter to Lilia already.

Davis

Oh, did you. Oh, good.

Espino

Yes. Hopefully she would have received it, or she will receive it next week. Should I pause it for a second? I think someone's coming. [Recorder turned off.]

Espino

Okay, we are recording again. You were telling me about your--well, I wanted to ask you about some close-knit friends that stayed in touch with after you resigned. You were just going to talk about Marion Graff and your friendship with her.

Davis

Marion, I think, is the most important. I think mainly I just--well, I still keep in touch with people from the mayor's office. His executive secretary, Wanda Moore, I call her once in a while. I saw a lot of them at his funeral and so on, and recently I talked to the woman who was in charge of--well, what would you call it, social relations? She dealt with all the consul generals of different countries and arranged for different events at city hall that had to do with the consul generals of the different countries and so on. I found some pictures of Bradley with the president of Mexico, two different presidents, and they didn't have pictures of him with any Hispanic or anything, so I sent those to them.

Davis

I just talk to different people at different times, but mostly it's just with family and like going with my granddaughter's family. They're always having one thing and another, and I go and Lilia will be there, too, so we see each other.

Espino

The other question I wanted to ask you about working for Bradley was how difficult or easy or what experience you had as a woman in a situation where everyone else was men. I mean, you said Wanda--

Davis

Yes, Moore, she was--

Espino

--Moore was a female.

Davis

--and all the secretaries and all.

Espino

All the secretaries. But would you say you had more power, more authority than the other women?

Davis

I had more responsibilities than they did, yes, but they were very supportive of me, Wanda particularly. Sometimes I would have a difficult situation, and I could always go in and talk to her. She used to handle the city gifts that we would take sometimes when we were going to see people of other countries and so on. We had to go in and ask for them and so on.

Espino

Do you remember anything specific of a situation where you felt like your gender impacted your role or the way people treated you?

Davis

No, I never encountered anything like that that I can remember. The only thing is, I know the press at the beginning used to haunt me to see how I was going to do things. They actually followed me around a whole day at the beginning and always wanted to know, "How are you going to do this?" I remember the mayor was out of town. He'd gone out of the country. I remember his wife, Mrs. [Ethel Arnold] Bradley, who we also knew very well, she told him that he should leave me the car. But I had my own car I was driving and so on. But I don't really remember ever having any problems. This mayor had a lot of women around him in different capacities and so on.

Espino

You don't think you were treated differently?

Davis

No.

Espino

Do you think that it was irrelevant that you were a woman?

Davis

Yes, they just treated--I was the deputy mayor.

Espino

You were the deputy mayor and people treated you as the deputy mayor.

Davis

Yes. Yes.

Espino

It didn't matter that you were Latina.

Davis

The employees from other departments, workmen who came to fix the lights or air-conditioning or something, and I remember when they were putting my name on the door. They were making very sure that the "Montañez" got on and so on. They were real happy. They used to always say hello and so on, if I would meet anywhere. I remember for a while I took to climbing the stairs for ten floors, and I used to run into a lot of people as I walked up the stairs and walked down and so on, and at the cafeteria.

Espino

When you first started with the mayor, it was during the 1970s, and that was when women were demanding more leadership roles. They were demanding to be taken more seriously. That wasn't an issue for you?

Davis

No.

Espino

You had Comisión Femenil emerging.

Davis

And I would go to meetings whenever I had time and so on.

Espino

But those weren't your issues.

Davis

No.

Espino

Those weren't important issues for you.

Davis

No. They were if I went to a woman's group. I would embrace whatever issues they were advocating and so on. I was invited by a woman's group across the city. There were Jewish women, lesbian women, and university women and so on, or even other genders. I remember going to--let's see. There was something. I can't remember the reason, but I do remember that we were out in the park, and there were a lot of people there, women in the street and so on. There would be very big gatherings, and they were just happy to have someone to come and speak to them.

Espino

So you were considered a role model to many different women's organizations.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Can you describe how they might have viewed you, how they might have looked to you as someone who broke barriers or moved into a position that was previously held by men or--

Davis

Just being present at as many activities as I possibly could. They appreciated the fact that I met with everybody at different levels and so on. I wasn't particularly about just going to professional woman's groups or so on. Many times I would go to the colleges and meet with students and women's groups. One time I went to Fullerton College, and there was a student there who told me she had been to UCLA and that they had my papers in the file, but that the file was labeled "Grace Davis" and not "Grace Montañez Davis." So I brought that to their attention. But that made me know that there were people who really were interested in how I had achieved.

Espino

Yes, and I think also the idea that you were so accessible, that you would come to all these different functions. In one of the L.A. Times articles it mentions that you had very little time for yourself because you were always--

Davis

Always on the go, and whenever I didn't have to go someplace, I would take advantage of that and I would stay at city hall, working at my desk way after midnight, two, three. I think I was there till four one day. The guard downstairs used to have to come and open the garage door. Fortunately, he was there twenty-four hours a day, and I had his phone number, so I would call.

Espino

The other article that I read that was interesting described you as "Bradley's right-hand woman," essentially. "Bradley's right-hand man is actually a woman, and it's Grace Montañez Davis." So you were accessible, but you also had a position where people highly regarded your work.

Davis

Yes. The other deputy mayor actually was very important, because he was chief of staff, and he was involved more with the day-to-day running of the office and so on.

Espino

Would you call your role more public relations?

Davis

Yes, very much so.

Espino

That must have been very important, too, though.

Davis

Yes, that was. In fact, at the press conference when the new deputy mayor came in, I found the name of the man that I remember. They had a whole group of people, and this man's name was Porfirio Miranda. I think he was a teacher at UCLA or something, but he was in the audience with women and different people. I forget--there was quite a few of them, and I had to laugh, because they were sitting at the press office chairs that we put. Everybody else had to stand, but they didn't know and they were sitting there. I remember he spoke up and asked Bradley who was going to take care of the community if I was gone. I don't remember what the answer was, probably that the rest of the people would and so on.

Espino

Yes, that must have been nice for the Latino community to have somebody like yourself to call for all those years that you worked for him. You were going to also tell me about your role with the gay community.

Davis

Oh yes.

Espino

Is this under Bradley as well?

Davis

Yes, it was under Bradley. In fact, it was before I was deputy mayor. I remember getting called one day by a man whose name was Morris [Knight]. I can't think of his last name, but he called me one day and told me that they were starting this center of the gay and lesbian [Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center], and that they had problems with the police and so on. So I took his invitation and I went to the center, and I remember that they were very

pleased to be able to present various people who were working in the center, but I know when they introduced them, they would say, "This is so-and-so, who's in charge of this, and this is his lover, who does this and this." We went through the whole body of people. Everybody introduced their lover. So I just went through and listened and all, and then I know they gave me a copy of the newspaper that they used to put out. I took it to the office and I read it.

Davis

But after I remember telling Morris, "If I invite you to my office and introduce people who have various responsibilities, I don't identify them as lovers. I mean, that's their personal business. It's nothing to do with the responsibilities and so on. So you would do well to just introduce people for the responsibilities and skills that they have." Then also the newspaper, they used to have a pink sheet in the middle of the newspaper, and that was for all these items that they use, I guess, when they have sex and what have you, and I told them, "It would seem to me, if you're going to be sending this newspaper to elected officials and other people in authority, that you don't want them to see that. That's for you and not for other people."

Davis

So Morris and I became very good friends. He used to call me all the time and so on. Then when I became deputy, I remember--I don't remember how much longer it was, but I got invited to--they were developing all kinds of things, like there was a man who was sustaining a library where they were keeping books and articles about the gay community and the various things. Their efforts dated way back and so on. I remember going to visit the library and being exposed about that.

Davis

But I think our work with the gay community became so important in just the time that the AIDS epidemic hit the community. I remember they would call me in the middle of the night, two o'clock in the morning sometimes, because the police had had a raid on their bathhouses or their bars or wherever they were, and they had arrested people and so on. So I would then have the name of the person. They'd give me to give it to me, and I would call. I would call right then and there, because the policemen were up if they had been raiding,

and I would call and ask what the violation was and so on, and why did they arrest them. Well, the police used to have a ball just giving me every detail of what they were doing and what they found and so on, I guess trying to shock me. I would just listen to them. Also I would call the person who was the liaison person from the mayor's office to the police department and let him handle the situation.

Davis

So we averted a lot of difficult things for them, and they had a voice or somebody to call in city hall. The mayor decided that we should have the liaison person for the gay community, and we had several gay people interview for the job. We finally picked one person, and I can't think of his name. He used to live near the Greek Theater. Then he went visiting and used to keep in touch with all the gay organizations and served as a liaison between their people and the mayor's office.

Davis

When the epidemic of the AIDS occurred, I remember that there was just a lot of hesitation [unclear]. People were very scared, thinking that they would contract AIDS just by being together with the person. I remember the county, because they have the medical facilities, established a committee of gay persons representing the various organizations and so on, and our delegate sat in on that. I know that I was invited, and my administrative assistant actually was more available at that time than I was, but I used to go to meetings. But I remember even shaking hands, you know, you were kind of wondering if something was going to happen. And the gays are very lovable; they like to hug you and so--but then we started to be educated about it.

Davis

At the beginning it was just the non-minority gays who were active and so on, but in this gay epidemic we started to hear from the blacks and the Hispanics, and they also started forming little groups of people and so on. We had a horrible time with the mayor's police guard, the people that guarded him and drove him around. One was Hispanic and two were black, and then I think there was one white fellow. But they had a horrible time whenever the gays came to the mayor's office to see him on the community day that he spent

with them. I really, looking back on that and seeing how they said the black community had voted for this Proposition 8, and they say because of churchgoers and what have you, but they have always been in denial that they have gay people.

Espino

Oh, the African American--from that time of the AIDS crisis, you think that--

Davis

I remember that we had trouble with them. They would not handle any situation that we had. They just were in denial.

Espino

Do you think Bradley was comfortable in the same room with the advocates?

Davis

Yes. Oh yes, he was very good. The trans--what do you call them, trans--

Espino

--vestites?

Davis

--vestites?

Espino

Transgender? No.

Davis

They used to come and he'd sit with them just like he did with anybody else and satisfied them and promised them all kinds of stuff, whatever.

Espino

Do you think it was people at the lower level?

Davis

It was people who were different, yes.

Espino

So what would his security guard--how would they react? What kinds of things would they do?

Davis

The African American would almost say that gays were not--that they could help it; that they were gay just because they wanted to be gay. I mean, that's not so. I've had to think a lot about this Proposition 8, but I can't help but think that they are children of God, and God thinks of them and cares for them like he does for the rest of us. While the church doesn't say it's a civil rights, I say it's just the love of God, that he made them, and he has given the wisdom and the knowledge to professional doctors and psychiatrists who have studied them and have come to the conclusion that they are that from the birth and so on. We're going to have to come to grips with that sometime and just accept it. But I think the blacks were just in denial.

Espino

At that time. And then Proposition 8, you're talking about what currently passed just last week. So then that was another group that you responded to their--

Davis

I don't remember what year it was. When they first started the gay pride parade, the very first grand marshal was Harvey Milk. He was a supervisor in San Francisco and a gay man, and they had him as the grand marshal for the first parade. I was number two. I remember taking my daughter, my second daughter, and a friend of ours who is gay and has been a friend to my children since she was little. She and my daughter rode in the car with me and were very delighted to be there. I had other times when I rode in the parade again, and I remember that the man who was a representative for the mayor in the gay community rode with me, and then his friend was there, and they made a picnic lunch in the car, and we were eating grapes all the time when we were riding.

Davis

That time we were going into a parking lot. I don't remember, but somehow the door of the car was open, and the driver, who was the mayor's staff

person, had moved the car, and the door was open, and it hit against the post, you know, the arm that lifts when you're going to pass through, and it knocked the door off. I was so afraid to have to come and tell the mayor. He had loaned his convertible that belonged to [Dwight D.] Eisenhower, the car at one time. It was a Cadillac. What do you call them? It doesn't have a rooftop.

Espino

Convertible?

Davis

Convertible, yes. It was aqua-colored and white and leather interior. It was a very nice car.

Espino

And did you stay in touch with the--after you resigned?

Davis

Well, I continued to go to all of the affairs. When they had the gay pride chorus of men, I went a couple of times to the concerts, and I remember how they were decimated during the AIDS epidemic. They lost a lot of members. I ran into Morris at the Social Security Administration. I think they're opening an office in Hollywood, and Morris just happened to be there as a resident of the area, and I got to see him. But it was just a group that I could relate to very well.

Espino

It seems like your role there was really to bring in people who otherwise might not have had a link or a connection to the mayor's office, because here you have the gay community, and then you have Latinos.

Davis

And I had all the Asian community. I remember going to a concert. There's a violinist in Japan, and I know that they have his classes here, and they had a concert of the students who had learned to play the violin from him. I remember I had to announce the winners of the various groups, and it was very easy for me to pronounce the Japanese names, because they sound just like the Spanish with the vowels and everything and so on. The Korean

community, they found somebody that could [represent them]--we had also hired--he had liaisons, people for the Korean community and the Japanese community and Chinese community. These were all people who worked out in the field, and so whenever they had an event and the mayor couldn't go to their event, I would go. So I got to know all those [communities].

Davis

There was one interesting thing. It was a Korean. I remember once going to a meeting, and this was professional women of theirs, and they were organized and trying to help each other, and I was very happy to see that. That gave me a lot of hope.

Espino

You also dealt with the local people who needed a voice, but you also dealt with international, the Latin American community. Like I was mentioning to you over the phone, I found an article where you met with Daniel Ortega from the Sandinistas.

Davis

He contacted the mayor's office, and there was a lot of discussion that the mayor should not meet with him because he was a Communist, I guess. So they told him to come on ahead, and they asked me to meet with him. So I remember meeting him, and the mayor was there. He didn't go anywhere that day. But I met with him in the conference room, and he had his wife [Rosario Murillo] with him. I don't remember if she was a professional person, but she had interest in social issues, and she asked to visit the children's museum that used to be right across from city hall and down the street. So we arranged for that. But I know that the lady who had charge of the consul generals of the different countries, she didn't have anything to do with it, but I know that when I was arranging the children's museum, that she was objecting to it. The liaison to the police department also was concerned that the man was there. But he was a very vocal, very interesting person, as his wife was.

Davis

That was the one time when I met--I dealt a lot with the people in Mexico. When [José] López Portillo was running, he had people in California and in

Texas and in all the various Hispanic states--where there were a lot of Hispanic. He actually had people to work among the people who were here from Mexico to encourage them to vote for him and support him. I remember he invited the people from California to go to Tijuana. He was having a big rally, and the mayor actually went to that. He rode in his own car, but I went with the people in the bus. The mayor met with López Portillo and other officials and so on at a hotel or someplace in Tijuana. I didn't go to that. But he had a rally at the arena for the bullfighting, and it was jam-full of people from all of California. I remember that he announced me, that I was there. I had to stand up and got cheered by all the people who were there. He did the same thing in Texas and all the other states.

Davis

Then when he was inaugurated, I got invited and I went and I took my oldest daughter [Deirdre] with me. They assigned--I don't know how they were able to do this, but they assigned a driver and a guard. They were both policemen. They were either local police or state police, and they drove us all over the place to go different places. I know when we went to the inauguration, we took time to go to the restroom after it was over, and when we came out, the people that we came with were gone. The place was emptied immediately, and we went outside and started walking to see if they would come or if there was a cab or something. We met some young reporters, and they asked, because they saw I was walking around, if we were lost. When we told them what happened, they offered to take us back to the hotel.

Davis

Well, there were two of them and two of us, and they had a little Volkswagen bug, so we managed to get in the car, and they took us back to the hotel. It turned out they were college students who were in training. I guess journalism was their major, and that they were covering the event for the newspaper. Well, they were having a get-together that night, the editor and other students who worked on the paper, and they told us where it was going to be and everything, and they invited my daughter. I guess our drivers had made it a point of telling us not to talk to people or do anything. They were very suspicious of everybody. The editor of the newspaper called me at the hotel to

assure me that he was going to be present and this was not a boisterous thing but a very dignified thing. So the drivers were very upset because I let her go.

Davis

I stayed, and I remember I was all alone and had dinner by myself. When it was all over, I told them that I wanted them to take me to where my daughter was, and they took me, and they went in with me and were examining all the rooms where these people were. I was so embarrassed and all. They stayed there all the time that I was there, and their presence, it was really embarrassing, because of all these people and everything. So we finally decided to go back to the hotel. So we went in and left, and the young men that we had met before came and picked us up again after we had been dropped off by the guards. But I remember the next day, obviously, they were displeased. The next day there was a luncheon for the inauguration. Jerry Brown, I think, was governor at the time, and he was present at all the briefings.

Espino

Keeping a close connection with the Mexican government seems to be an important role for Los Angeles city officials.

Davis

Yes, it was, yes.

Espino

An important role for you, too, when you were deputy mayor.

Davis

I used to go to Mexico every year with the Mexican American Opportunities Foundation [MAOF] and Dionicio Morales. I used to go with its board. I went on my own very early in the mayor's administration. In fact, when he got sworn in, Mexico had reporters here from the television stations and the newspaper. So for the Cinco de Mayo, the mayor of the city of Mexico came to visit Los Angeles, and he brought a whole group of people with him. They spent several days here, and I don't remember what activities we had. I think we had something going at city hall, but they were there, and they spent a few days with us and so on.

Davis

He [the Mayor of Mexico City] invited me to go for the 15 de septiembre, so I went. We had about sixteen or maybe more about twenty-two Mexican or Hispanic commissioners of the city departments, and so I invited them to come, and around twelve or fourteen of them came. We got to see the celebration from--the governor's palace is on one side and the city hall is on another side. They had windows, and we were at all the windows. We could see the governor, or the president, rather, over there and look down in the Zócalo. It was a all-day parade of the students of Mexico. They had given the students shoes so that they would look presentable, and they were representing every conceivable sport that you can think of. They marched, and in the middle of the square they would have various dramatizations of various aspects of the war that they had won in May--September, rather. It was an incredible thing. I don't remember; I must have taken pictures or something.

Davis

I took my father [Alfredo Montañez] and my son [Alfred Davis] to that, because I remember they roomed together. They took us to a restaurant one evening. They took us to Taxco to go visit there. That was an all-day affair. On the way back it was already dark, but they took us to a restaurant that was in the middle of a lake. Do you know that at all?

Espino

In downtown? I mean in Mexico City?

Davis

Mexico. I don't remember if it was right in Mexico City or not. But the restaurant was closed, and they opened it for us, and we had dinner there, all the commissioners and myself. Also, the regional director of the Department of Labor, Dr. Ed Aguirre, and his wife, came with us. He was a friend of mine from when I [was with the Department of Labor]--

Espino

I'm going to pause it just for a second, and then we'll pick up.[Recorder turned off.]

Espino

Okay, we're back again. You were telling me about your trips to Mexico with the Bradley administration.

Davis

My trips every year with MAOF, those trips were by his executive board, who felt that they were serving the Mexican community here in Los Angeles, and in order to know more about their culture and the way they did things, that they visited different parts of Mexico every year. This had been going on forever. I stopped going, I guess, when I had my second stroke, I think.

Espino

So you were on the executive board of the Mexican American--

Davis

No. I had been the project officer for them and just maintained a friendship with them.

Espino

So you were the person providing grants.

Davis

No, I was just the person who oversaw the grant after it was granted by the regional or national office.

Espino

Okay, and then with Bradley, under Bradley's administration, you went to Mexico a few times as well, or--

Davis

Well, I would just go, I guess. There were times when I was representing the city, but not that many times.

Espino

Okay. And then the other organization that you were involved with somewhat was the East Los Angeles Community Union, TELACU. The East Los Angeles Community Union.

Davis

TELACU. I was involved with them also as a grant officer. I used to go to the site of the program and make sure they were doing everything according to the contract. After I was deputy mayor, I didn't have any more to do with them, so I know when they audited them and said that they had a four-hundred-dollar wastepaper basket and so on, I wasn't aware of any of those things. But they're still doing a good job. They have many senior citizen housing projects all over. So they're still doing--and they have an office there on Olympic Boulevard.

Espino

So they also started with War on Poverty funds like the MAOF.

Davis

Yes. The Watts Labor Community group [Watts Labor Community Action Committee] was funded at the same time, one in East L.A. and one in South Central.

Espino

So it seems like in the eighties is when they came under scrutiny. For some reason they caught the attention of the auditors, who wanted to--

Davis

But they continue to be funded, so I guess they finally settled.

Espino

Yes. What I read was that the money, that once it left the federal government's hands and was turned over to TELACU representatives, it was no longer federal money. It was now private money, and they could spend it however they--so there was really no basis for--

Davis

I'm not sure. I think it still is federal money. The government is just providing it, and that's why you have a contract of how you're supposed to carry out the responsibilities.

Espino

There wasn't a question about lack of oversight? Some of these programs didn't want the government telling them how to--they wanted autonomy. They didn't want the government telling them how to spend this money.

Davis

Yes, but you can't do that. I don't remember having any problems when I was--and they had other staff persons there at the time, so--

Espino

I guess it was the fact that they were using some of the federal grant money to provide loans to the high-level employees so that they could start their own private business enterprises. That was one of the criticisms.

Espino

Oh, really.

Davis

They also had a few expensive vehicles, like Mercedes-Benz, and trips to Mexico, like some of the trips that you mentioned. So I guess I was kind of curious what benefit TELACU got from going to Mexico, using federal money to take their staff and employees to Mexico.

Davis

The only thing I can think of, the same as MAOF, exposing the non-Hispanic board members to the culture and ways of the people that we serve here in Los Angeles. And it does help. We had a much more sensitive board, and we couldn't expect to have Hispanic board members, because these were corporation people, and mostly they were not Hispanic.

Espino

So it had a public relations purpose.

Davis

Yes.

Espino

Not necessarily a business or a--

Davis

No. It was just really to expose people.

Espino

So how do you feel about thinking that maybe some of the grants that you helped funnel to them was used for expensive vehicles or--

Davis

I would be against that.

Espino

You don't remember that at the time--

Davis

No.

Espino

--them being charged with that?

Davis

Not early in the time.

Espino

It was in the eighties when they were audited, and eventually they were not-- there was one person charged with something, but the rest of the members of the organization were not charged.

Davis

I don't know who--I was no longer with the Department of Labor.

Espino

Right. At that time. That's true. But it was just curious to me, because there were several articles written about that organization, and it didn't seem like the issue was ever really fully resolved, but they managed to stay in existence, and they kept receiving funding, and they still exist today. So looking back and

judging their history of work, how would you describe their achievements or their weaknesses as an organization?

Davis

I think that probably there were things that they had to show the funding agencies; that things had to be done in a certain way if you were going to serve the Hispanic community. The funding agencies had a lot to learn, too. I mean, they were funding people, and you have to take into consideration the different characteristics of the people and what motivates them, and the people with TELACU were there to tell them.

Espino

Did you ever witness anybody's taking a little bit more than they should have, because that was a criticism of a lot of different--not just War on Poverty, but if you look at the SEIU [Service Employees International Union], the union today, they're under criticism, one of their leaders, for using some of the money for private needs. So that's not atypical.

Davis

No, that's not typical. That's just a person's lack of moral aptitude or something. You know, they're going to be wrong wherever they are.

Espino

Right. It's not a criticism of the union and the fact that there are unions.

Davis

No, it's the individual.

Espino

So do you remember seeing people like that, people who benefited from the War on Poverty, using some of that money inappropriately instead of really channeling it to the people who most needed it?

Davis

No, because most of the people that I knew who received funding were either the school districts, where they pretty much are monitored, and again, I don't remember meeting any individual who had benefited by this. I know, for

instance, with the American Indians [unclear], we had to take into consideration their specific needs and so on within the tribal organizations that they have. They have a self-governing unit, and they do things a certain way, and we just have to stop and look at it very carefully to see how they're doing things and find out that they're not cheating you or anything; that they have reasons for why they do things that way. I learned that with the American Indian, and it was a good example. That was a highly structured organization that has been around for years, and it has served them well.

Espino

Is there anything else, Grace, that you want to add to this long series of interviews?

Davis

Did I tell you about the Social Security Commission? I told you that one.

Espino

Yes.

Davis

That was their national thing. I was very happy to serve on that. One thing, serving in these various capacities, I was exposed to people like from the Brooklyn Institute [of Arts and Sciences] and various other organizations, that were very beneficial for me to understand the way they think and so on.

Davis

There was one thing. The general manager of the general--oh, what is it? I guess it's the department that handles the maintenance of the city, all the repairmen--they had a woman for a manager there for a while, and I know she put on this event. It was called the Street Scene, and they closed off the streets from First Street on up, all the way up above Eighth Street. It was for Cinco de Mayo, and she managed to have about three of those ongoing. But again, she was removed from the department. They accused her of hiring her own sister and doing all kinds of stuff. But she was very good. I remember working with her to put on that event.

Espino

Do you remember her name?

Davis

I can't think of it at all.

Espino

We can probably find that. So you think the accusations were false, or--

Davis

No, I guess her sister did work for her. I think two sisters did, and she probably was very lenient with them. But that wasn't the only thing, and I don't remember other things. But that's the only time I remember a department head being removed. I keep thinking Olivia, but that was not her name. I can't think of her name.

Davis

Did I tell you about going to Germany? I think I did tell you--Immigration, yes.

Espino

Yes.

Davis

The man who was the head of Immigration, Ernie Gustafson, I remember that during the time that we granted amnesty to the people who were here without documents, they did a real tremendous job of opening different sites so that the people could go to them; training their people to work on this. I was very close to--I had contacts. Whenever people asked me about status of the citizenship, I was able to call somebody. There was a man. I think his name was Raúl. He was the one who handled special passports, like remember when Nixon had special chefs? He was the one who processed the passport for them, the entry for them.

Davis

Sometime after, a man from the Chinese community was going to open up a restaurant, and he wanted to get special chefs from China who knew how to cook a certain way, and Raúl helped me with that. I remember going with the Chinese man to his office there in the Federal Building, and he was able to

approve everything. But when it got to China, the woman who was in charge of immigration there turned it down, and we were never able to get them. I think he got somebody later, but it wasn't the people he wanted.

Espino

That's interesting, that who you know, if you know people in high places, you can really move those Immigration officials to your side. That's interesting.

Davis

I used to know the people from the time that I taught citizenship.

Espino

Oh, in the Immigration Department.

Davis

Yes. Well, we dealt with them because they were the ones who interviewed the people for citizenship.

Espino

Oh yes, of course. And you kept those relationships all the way through your career with the different people that you worked with.

Davis

Yes. I had a contact in Customs, and especially when they were Hispanic, I mean, that was terrific, yes. I know he used to help with people who were coming in. In fact, I was looking through my address book, and very prominent on the first page is his name [Quentin Villanueva] and telephone number.

Davis

Well, this has been a very interesting experience for me, recalling things that I hadn't called to mind for a long time, and I look forward to seeing the end product.

Espino

It's been a great experience for me, too. It's been my first full life history interview, and it's been a pleasure talking with you and hearing all your wonderful stories.

Davis

Good. You're an easy person. You seem to draw things out from us and so on. You do your homework very well.

Espino

Thank you. Well, I'm going to stop it here, Grace, and thank you. It's been a wonderful, wonderful experience for me.

Davis

Thank you.[End of interview]

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