

A TEI Project

Interview of Julian Nava

Table of contents

1. Transcript
 - 1.1. Session 1: Part 1 (July 21, 2009)
 - 1.2. Session 1: Part 2 (July 21, 2009)
 - 1.3. Session 2 (July 28, 2009)
 - 1.4. Session 3 (August 4, 2009)
 - 1.5. Session 4 (August 25, 2009)

1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1: Part 1 (July 21, 2009)

Espino

This is Virginia Espino and today is July 21, 2009. I'm interviewing Dr. Julian Nava at his home in Valley Center, California. Okay, Dr. Nava, we're going to start with your earliest recollections or what you remember about your parents and their family history. Can you tell me a little bit about what you know of your mother and/or your father?

Nava

Certainly. Both Mother [Refugio Flores Nava] and Father [Julian Nava Carlos] were born and raised in the state of Zacatecas, and Mother was raised in a charming colonial-looking town called Tepetongo, which was what we would call the county seat or municipio. Municipio corresponds to what we would call a county, because there are public offices there and so forth. Dad was raised in another charming mountain town one day's walk away, una jornada as they put it then, called Susticacán, pretty phonetic, Susticacán. They were remotely related, not by blood but by family marriage ties, where they knew about each other but not in Mexico. During

the Mexican Revolution, Zacatecas right in the heart of Mexico, was a Broadway for competing armies, both the federal army troops and the revolutionary troops, which were often subdivided into a number of other gangs that just under the banner of the revolution were really just bandits.

And so Mother told us that she was a young girl in her teens, and she remembered that soldiers traipsed through Jerez, which was a nearby city, the center of marijuana growing now as a matter of fact, and Tepetongo on the way to Mexico City, and they gathered cattle and horses, young men and young girls. The boys, they forced them to join their soldiers under threats of death, and the girls, they took them to cook for them and as housemaids. And so Mother said that people had, in the town of Tepetongo--Susticacán was more out of the way, was up more in the mountains, but they had young children located along the road, and when they saw the dust of horses [they gave the alarm.]

Nava

So when the kids sounded the alarm, well then everybody then just hid valuables that they had not hidden already, and by this time the people had dug holes into the walls of their homes or built a second wall where they hid the boys and their daughters and then put furniture in front of the small openings that you could just crawl through, and they had to stay in there sometimes a day or two, so you can imagine personal needs, stuck in there with no venting, just like stuck in a closet until finally the patriots all left. Then the kids could come out. So that's why Mother came with her new husband [Ventura Muñatones]. She had just been married, and they came by train to El Paso, and they rode, she said, on the top of the train, on the top of the train like hundreds of others, and at that time the U.S. just let people in. It wasn't interested in documentation because, as a matter of fact, it was the war [World War I] economy and the postwar economy, and there was a tremendous need for labor, all kinds of labor.

And Mother soon had two children, Carlos and Elena [Flores], and then she and her husband were living with relatives, for immigrants from Mexico tend to congregate where they have relatives already established. And Ventura, her husband, caught the flu [1918-1920], and you may remember that was a global, it was a pandemic. Millions and millions of people globally died of the flu. There was no vaccine and Ventura died, and in the United States, if I remember right, there must have been about five to seven million people that died of the flu, and that was at a time when our population was much less, so proportionately it was a very, very serious thing.

So Mother was left alone with Carlos, who was about four or five, and Helen, just a little kid, and taken care of by family. Then she learned that Julian Nava came to visit, and one thing led to another, and Julian decided to take care of Refugio Flores and her two children, and they took up and became a family. Julian worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad. He was kind of a bookkeeper, it's not clear, but he was very literate, read greatly and was an addict, you might say, for health. There was an author at that time called [Bernard] McFadden, and he published books on health, and I remember this was a multi-volume set we had, Bernard McFadden, that was his name. We had those books in the house, and I would look at them when I was young, because it showed pictures of the body and the liver, colored photos, very, very detailed.

So Dad was very attuned to health things, and he required that Mother have always a very balanced diet of vegetables, I remember that, vegetables and fruit and cheese and milk, and I remember also he insisted that we eat very slowly. He said that when you chew your food thoroughly, your body digests it better, because you send down--the food is immersed in saliva, which promotes digestion. He also said, "You should not drink water when you're eating a meal," and we never have, and to this day I don't drink water when I'm eating, because he said that dilutes your digestive juices. You should drink

water, but not mix it with your food. So there are a number of things like that that related to health.

But they then came to live in the San Joaquin Valley; Julian Nava and Ruth Refugio Flores came to live in the San Joaquin Valley. And then for an amount of time that I don't know, then he came to live in Los Angeles. The two of them came to live in Los Angeles, because Dad had a brother Lucio [Nava], who was, as it turned out, an excellent tailor. He made clothes for people, which was more common then than now, not off the rack, and he made clothes for movie actors. I don't know how he got involved in that, but he was very comfortably set, because he made clothes for many of the famous actors of that time. So Dad got a barber's license and set up a barbershop in what's called Boyle Heights, just east of downtown Los Angeles, where there are some sharp hills that go up, hence Boyle Heights.

I went to the barbershop many times as a child, and when there were no customers around Dad would let me with a push broom sweep up the hair of people, and Dad, as it turns out, was a craftsman, and he made musical instruments in the back of the barbershop, which was like the floor area of a one-car garage, a little bit more because it was long. I remember it was long. He had tools back there, and he made harps and guitars and chess pieces. The shop became a gathering place for friends, and Dad's friends were all intelligent people, because as it turns out, immigrants from Mexico came from all social levels, and some were illiterate, some were literate, and some were teachers and even professionals. So I remember that when the guys came in every now and then when I was there after school, they always called Dad maestro. "Buenos tardes, maestro." And I always wondered about that until I had it figured out. He wasn't a teacher, but it was a term of respect, because he knew something very, very well, and what he did was to make instruments.

And they talked politics. Dad was a socialist and an atheist. In other words, he finally figured out there's no God. It's a creation of man's need to appeal to something which will help him explain what he does not understand, and he was well read, so he knew about countless gods of other cultures over time, and he must have figured, looking back, that every society has its own gods. This went along with medicine, his interest in medicine, and so he'd also figured out that economic life should be established to serve the people and not to serve the people that made the money from the labor of the people, so he was a socialist, not a communist to my knowledge, and the barbershop was kind of like a meeting ground of intelligentsia at that level.

At that time you can get a haircut and a shave for less than a quarter, and so men came in if not every day every other day for a shave, if they were concerned about their appearances. And in time, during the depression one of the things that helped drive the barber business into the ground was the invention of the safety razor, because then a man could shave himself and not have to go to the barber to get a shave, because a shave at the barber's took twenty minutes, because first they put this hot, hot towel all over your face to soften up the beard, and then the soap on your face. The whole thing was a ceremony. All during the time, you're talking about the latest political development or whatever, and then you got your shave and then you left, so that, except for cutting your hair, that kind of cut into the barbershop business in time.

But we have one harp that Dad made. I wonder who has it? Oh, my older brother Henry, because we pass it around. Every five years another member of the family has Dad's harp. Dad also did very beautiful embroidery, where there was a little handheld machine [imitates sound] that perforated a coarse piece of fabric held on a frame, and it made a pattern, flowers or people and so forth. So those are memories I treasure about Dad. He always made things.

Espino

Do you know if he learned that skill from his parents, or where he developed that skill from?

Nava

I don't know. But his brother [Lucio Nava] was a sought-after tailor. Oh, and mira, by chance--

Espino

Okay, I'm going to pause it just for a second.

Espino

Okay, so your father made these incredible--these pieces that you're showing me, these chess pieces are exquisite. I've never seen anything with the two-tone wood--

Nava

In this manner.

Espino

Right. Did other people in your neighborhood work with their hands, or was your father one of the only that you knew of?

Nava

Well, I was very young, because Dad died, struck by a car coming home from work when I was about ten.

Espino

Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

Nava

All of us have one thing or another from Dad, and this has dried over the years, but at first it was very tight.

Espino

The chess box. Did people come from around the neighborhood to buy his instruments and his chess pieces?

Nava

Not from around the neighborhood. I don't know where they came from, but there were people that--they were not ordinary people. They were artists who, you know--how many people want to buy a harp? And a guitar more common, but it's interesting that he made--guitars are easy to make by comparison with a harp. A harp's about that tall and very, very lovely. But that's what Dad did, and then the depression came. I was born in '27 and the depression came, and in about 1933 or '34 or '35, because I must have been about five years old, something like that, the federal government devised a policy to lighten the burden of the costs of relief by sending away from the country residents that were not citizens. So there was some relocation of Italians, Russians, and other Europeans living mostly on the East Coast, but not in great numbers as there were Mexicans sent back in the relocation program, and the relocation program was turned over to states for administration as I recall.

There isn't much written about it. Mexicans didn't write much about it, and other Americans were ashamed and didn't keep records. It's like the Japanese relocation, okay. You really have to dig hard to get scraps of items in local newspapers. Anyway, Dad disposed of his barbershop, and I remember where it was, two locations around the corner from each other. I could go to them right now. We packed up everything into big wooden crates, and Mother had to sell furniture and valuable things, because she was--we were I guess at that time what you might call middle class. Dad was a businessman. He had a barbershop with three chairs, so that's not bad. She had to sell her washing machine. It was the kind that had four legs, I remember, then the tank and then the plunger there that went up and down and turned. I can still hear it [imitates sound] thrashing the clothes, and then with the rubber rollers on top.

And then what also broke her heart was she had to sell her Victrola. That's one of those tall things about four feet high and you had to wind it, and the winding lasted as long as one 78 [rpm] record, and I was not big enough, tall enough to wind it, so if you put two and two together that's about my height, you see. I could not wind the whole thing. So she sold everything in the depression era for very, very little, but it had to go. We had to vacate the house. I remember the address, 800 Lord Street, and friends and relatives lived nearby.

We came to the last night. We were to catch the train at Union Station the next morning, and there must have been fifty people, if not seventy-five, cousins by the dozens and friends and other relatives, and the house was empty. There were some guitarists, and they were supplying the music, and people were dancing and they were drinking. And someone brought a big double-decker box of Baby Ruths, and I remember being big enough so that I could reach over the counter--all counters are thirty-five inches; they still are--and get the box of Baby Ruths, and with close friends and cousins we stole out the kitchen and then went under the house, because the house was built like on a slope, and underneath the house you could crawl under there, which we thought was always adventuresome. And five or six boys and girls my age, we went in there and we ate all the Baby Ruths. How many did I eat? I don't remember, but it must have been about four or five, and Baby Ruths were larger then. What the companies have done is just make everything smaller. Even Cokes, they have a smaller Coke bottle, Classic Coke bottle. The party went on and on and on and about four or five in the morning when--because they were going to see us off at the train station, which would then go towards Arizona and then El Paso.

Espino

You were heading back to Mexico?

Nava

We were going back to Zacatecas, because if we didn't, the county, L.A. County had put us on notice that they could not account for any more food, because at that time a relief program had started to give people who didn't have any food some food. And I developed a very bad stomach ache from the candy bars, and Dad, thanks to his medical knowledge, asked me, "Donde te duele? Where does it hurt?" And then I showed him where it hurt, on the lower right-hand side, and so he knew that's where the appendix is, and so he said, "It's not the stomach, it's the appendix," because it was very, very hot and it would just burn. He touched it. Ooh, it hurt. So they put me into a friend's van, which was a tailor's van I remember, a friend of the family, and drove me not very far away to the L.A. County Hospital. It was really only about fifteen blocks across what is now the 10 Freeway coming out of town.

They took me right into the receiving room and told the nurse, "The boy is very, very ill. He has a terrible temperature." And so I was told later a young doctor came out and examined me and he said, "Get this kid to the OR immediately." So they must have--I was delirious--put me on a stretcher and took me into the operating room and within half an hour they had taken out my appendix. And apparently it was either a young surgeon who was learning how to do it, or they were in a big hurry, because they made a very big ugly cut, so they just kind of went in, took out the appendix, and I might have had what's called peritonitis, some infection. It might have burst. And so rather than go home for three or four days or a week after an appendectomy, I was there for three or four weeks, and I remember that there was a tube stuck into my belly that was draining, and it was probably draining, what do you call it, peritoneal fluid or something, in a container until finally the infection went away. And I've been fine regarding the appendectomy ever since.

But what that meant was that the family missed the train, and we went in to live with relatives until Dad could find a place where all of us could get together. But he had no barbershop and he'd sold all of his tools. He had nothing but his hands. So he got a job through the WPA, Works Project Administration, one of the dozen of FDR's depression-era make-work projects, like today. I remember that he would come home very, very tired, because he was with hundreds and hundreds of others just digging trenches and moving earth for road building in L.A., and at that time there weren't the tractors that we have today. Cutting and moving earth was done by hand, and he would come home extremely tired.

Then we got a chance to move into a lovely home. A family friend, [Antonio] Reveles, a family friend--Reveles was a renowned painter, very well known in artistic centers in L.A. His forte was painting the huge curtains that at that time were dropped and raised at movie theaters to start the show and to end the show, and I don't know whether there's any one of those curtains still there in the Million Dollar Movie, which is on 3rd and Broadway, or the Orpheum [Theater], which is on 8th and something else. I could get to it. But he did those in several of the movie theaters in downtown L.A. and other parts of L.A., and he must have gotten paid very, very well. He also did other painting, and they lived in a lovely home near West L.A. He had a charming and actually very beautiful wife, who later left him for a Mr. Brown, family scandal.

But they had money, and he had a lot of knowledgeable people, and at that time there was a business-education school called National Schools, which is still there on 40th and Figueroa. They were trying to acquire adjacent homes to expand the buildings of National Schools, and they had acquired about six homes, and there were two homes left that the owners didn't want to sell, and so National Schools then let us move into one of those homes free. Eight children in about four bedrooms, two stories, fireplace, cellar, a lovely home on

40th Street, and the idea was to let these Mexicans move in, and then it would discourage (sic) the Anglo people to sell, and then they could demolish the homes and put up their buildings. Well, we lived there about a year, year and a half, and I remember Dad had to take the streetcar into L.A. to where he worked. And Mother, who could not speak English, made friends with the ladies who lived on either side, just by her manner. All of the Nava kids were well-behaved. I think my brother Henry got a job mowing the lawn for one of the families, and we just hit it off with the neighbors, and they didn't sell. [laughs] They didn't sell.

I remember it was a big deal, because USC was just a short distance away, Exposition Park, and so on the big football games people would rent their lawn in front, so people could drive their car up it. I think they must have paid fifty cents or maybe even an exorbitant dollar to park their car there. So after that year and a half or so--and by this time I was in elementary school--we then had to move, because they said, "No more. We want the house." We moved to 66th Street, farther south in L.A., into a small two-bedroom house, and some of us slept on the floor. There was a Jewish couple that rented the house right next to us, and we got along fine with them. We got the feeling that not everybody in the neighborhood liked them, which was not new to us, because in East L.A. where we had grown up, there were Mexicans, Italians, Jews, and Japanese, no Chinese. And so we grew up in this mix, and we called each other whatever we were. We called each other, "Who are you?" "I'm Japanese," or, "I'm Italian," or, "I'm Mexican," with no disparaging intent. That's just what you were, and among these were Jews.

So we got along fine with our Jewish neighbors on 66th Street, and we went to 66th Street Elementary School. And then I noticed one thing interesting, that during their Christmas that the Jewish family didn't buy presents for the children for

Christmas. They bought presents for the children for Hanukah, which I think is a few days after. Algo asi.

Espino

Or before.

Nava

Or before, one or the other, but that's when they bought presents for their kids and not for Christmas. So our attitude was, "Well, fine. You do it when you want to do it." So we lived there a long time, and then we moved back to East L.A. and lived in about three different houses, moving only because the rent went up. But I remember since the time we lived on Santa Barbara Street near USC I was big enough that I went on Thursdays with Mother to Exposition Park to pick up two big bags of food which the government gave to families, and they gave whatever there was, surplus food which the government bought from farmers, which kept them alive, although many of them came to California during the so-called Ookie movement, "Grapes of Wrath" period, so to speak. And I was just old enough to have two shopping bags that would be full of maybe a pound or two of prunes or raisins or apples or zucchini, cabbage, potatoes, onions, basic stuff like that, and then bring it home, and then that's what Mother would prepare.

And I remember acquiring a great distaste for prunes and raisins, because sometimes that's about all we could eat for about three or four days until they were all gone, and so we had prune this or raisin that, and Mother fixed them in all the different ways you could imagine. We also got cereal, also cereal, but that relief program kept millions, probably several hundred million Americans alive. Well, that profoundly impressed me, and it still does in terms of national policy. So we moved back to the barrio, closer to other friends and family, and that's where the experience began when my older brothers and sisters were now able to hold part-time jobs, washing dishes or taking someone to the grocery store or

mowing the lawns. And Carlos [Nava], who by now was maybe nineteen or twenty, fell in love with Antonia Munatonez, a lovely girl whose dad made candy in the backyard. He had this big space where he made candy, so he was comfortably set. He made Mexican candy.

And the scandals later on among the family came to light that Don Tiburcio [Munatonez], that was his name, Tiburcio, didn't approve of Carlos. Now, Carlos as it turned out was tall, very, very handsome, and well built and tall, very respectful and very hardworking. He was just one nice, nice person, and he fell in love with Tonia, who would have had a hard time marrying under ordinary circumstances, because one of her eyes was mis-set. It was like this. It looked like this. So when you looked at her you kind of--and Carlos cared only the fact that she was otherwise not just a simply very attractive girl but a very nice girl. So I've always guessed that Don Tiburcio agreed to the marriage because, well, Carlos was probably the best she was going to get, and they proceeded to have beautiful children, Joe, Conrad, and Olivia, beautiful children.

So Henry was now the oldest boy in the family, and Henry was working in this place or the other place, and we were just scraping along. I remember in one case in one of the houses that we lived in, the house had a small living room, a dining room, a bathroom, and a kitchen, and seven of us were living there, so we slept on the floor like enchiladas. In the morning we had to roll up everything and put it away, and that's why I still like to put things away, and my wife doesn't, and it sometimes annoys her that I put things away. And I tell her, "I'm programmed that way. You had to, you had to." So we'd fold everything up carefully so it all fit into a small, little closet. So we lived in one small house like that after another, and the houses are still there, and I have great affection and fond memories of things that happened in each one of them. And it was during that period when we moved back to L.A. that my

mother broke with the Catholic Church. I think I told you that story before.

Espino

Before we go on to that, can we just step back a little bit, and I don't know if you have any more recollections about the repatriation. Possibly other family members or friends were forced to leave or asked to leave, from your neighborhood or from your community?

Nava

Let's see. Dad was going to go back with the Reveles family.

Espino

Back to Mexico?

Nava

Yes, back to Mexico, and I don't know the niceties. You were kind of offered the opportunity to go back and not expelled as such. Chicano historians may use that term, but that is not what happened. You were told, "We will supply free transportation for you, and if not then you are on your own and we are not responsible for your welfare." And since already food distribution had started, what were the alternatives? Now, I don't remember that any other people in the neighborhood had to, because remember, Mexicans at that time were only about a fourth of the people living in that part of East L.A. that we knew. The others were Italians, Jews, Japanese, and some Russians, which they always were in haste to say, "We are White Russians. We are for the czar, not for the communists." So the Navas and the Reveleses were not aware of any mass numbers of people that were acquaintances.

Now, Dad and Mr. [Nicolas] Reveles were thinking of, and I think may have already got into some correspondence regarding acquiring an ejido in Mexico, because the Reveleses

came from that same municipio, and then building a cooperative community, an ejido. So this kind of reflected not only their acquaintance with Mexican politics and that this was possible, but the idea also of a society where groups of families would then own the land communally and work on it with whatever they wanted or were able to do to earn a living. And that fell through. When the Navas didn't go, the Reveleses stayed in town also. But the numbers are hazy as to the total number of people involved in the repatriation, but I think it was in the neighborhood of 500,000 to 700,000 people, and it's hard to pinpoint that because counties and states in the Southwest where this mostly took place didn't have any interest in keeping records. Now things would be different. Some kind of repatriation might still take place.

Espino

Do you remember feeling targeted, or do you remember feeling that it was discriminatory? I mean, since your father--

Nava

I was too young.

Espino

Your parents never talked about that, since your father was kind of political?

Nava

No. If he did, I was too young to remember, because I must have been about seven years old, and it was embarrassing, and it's a cultural trait not just, I think, of Latinos or Hispanics, to not talk about something that you're ashamed of or belligerent about. But after all, the children were all born in the States, so they were American citizens and they were being expelled because their parents were being expelled. So you can get into an interesting discussion about civil rights, and that same dilemma is an issue today, the same thing.

Espino

Do you think your parents regret not having left? Or do you think they were relieved that they were forced to stay?

Nava

I don't remember. I was too young to discuss that. Of course, the children were all delighted that we stayed.

Espino

Oh, really.

Nava

Oh, yes, because we had no concept about Mexico, no concept whatsoever, not any photographs and had not been in touch with cousins over there. All those cousins that are still surviving are now living here, and they've all become naturalized a long time ago and have nice homes, middle-class homes, kids have all gone to college. They're American like the Navas became "American," quote, unquote. So I don't have many recollections personally of the relocation, because I was too young. All I'm aware of is the effects.

Espino

Your older siblings probably have a little bit more of a sense of that period.

Nava

Yes. Yes.

Espino

How much senior are your older siblings than you?

Nava

The next older is Lola [Nava Guerra], who I just saw three days ago, but she's two years older. Dad was very organized, when I say she's two years older, because all of us are born

two years apart. It's almost as if Dad knew the menstrual cycle and said, "All right, it's time for another child." All of us are within two to three months apart, two years apart. So Lola's two years older, and then the next oldest is Lucy [Nava Hernandez], and she just passed away about six years ago, heart attack, boom, just like that. Bang, just fell down. And then after Lucy--I still miss her, she was such a sweetheart--Henry, and Henry was two years older than Lucy. And Henry's the one that's losing his marbles, dementia--

Espino

So he's six years older than you.

Nava

Yes. So this last--this is Tuesday, right--Saturday the surviving siblings gathered at Henry's house. Lola came down from Goleta, north of Santa Barbara, and her husband, and one of her daughters drove them, because she can't drive anymore, and her husband Jess Guerra cannot drive anymore. Well, he cannot get on a freeway. He can drive on city streets only. And then my younger sister, four years younger than me, because two years younger than me is Daniel [Nava], who passed away, and then Rosemary [Herzig], and Rosemary came. So the surviving siblings, Rosemary, Julian, Lola, and Henry gathered at Henry's house. And I had gone to the trouble of dismembering my family photo album, taking out pictures that I thought that each of them would like to have a copy of. So I put the pictures for each of them in a manila folder, envelope, and gave them to the other three. And so we had a wonderful Saturday in the backyard under the patio cover with a fan blowing, comparing pictures and memories.

And there's one picture of Henry, who in his youth was a gymnast, and he just had a tremendous figure and muscles and everything, and he's on--do you know what parallel bars are? So he was on one parallel bar on his right arm, balancing himself horizontally with that one arm on the bar, which is

pretty neat, okay. And when he saw that picture he said, "Who's this?" Ah, Dios mio. "It's you, damn it! Yeah. See, don't you see the Coliseum behind?" because it was at the Coliseum playground there. Those parallel bars are probably still there. And he said, "Oh, yeah." Then he said, "That's the one-arm--," whatever you call it. And he said, "And that's pretty hard, you know." So it all came back to him. So I don't think that Henry or Lola are good for much recollection anymore. Lucy was the one who was the family historian, and her husband was a Presbyterian minister, and she died of a sudden heart attack on the kitchen floor.

Espino

I'm so sorry.

Nava

So we just have spot memories of early family history.

Espino

Well, a lot happened, it seems, before your father passed away, in those ten years. You moved a lot. Your father went from successful barber to losing his shop and--

Nava

Manual labor. Then later on though, when he died he'd gotten back into barbershop work. In fact, he was coming back from the barbershop. It was winter, so it was already dark, six or seven o'clock. We didn't have daylight savings then. So he was crossing Mission Road--I know just where it happened--and a car struck him, and it was a medical doctor of all things that struck him, and he died of blood poisoning, which was the result of inadequate care in the hospital.

Espino

So he was not killed on impact. He was taken to--

Nava

To a hospital, yes. He died in the [L.A. County General] Hospital, in the general--that hospital is still there. It's a great, big, tall, monumental building, and insufficient monitoring there. And so every time without fail, every time I drive by that hospital I look at it and then I remember, that hospital, that building over there, the lower one where they took me in is on Mission Road and Pomeroy, that hospital saved my life, and it also cost me Dad's life, because he should not have died. It was a blow on the knee or something, a bad fracture on the knee, so there was a blood infection, and at that time Mexicans didn't sue hospitals or sue doctors, so that's how Dad passed away. He would have lived. He probably would have lived another ten years more or fifteen years more, so I was deprived of knowing my Dad as a person, because I must have been ten or twelve years old when he died, young.

Espino

Do you remember your Mom feeling that the hospital was responsible?

Nava

No. No. I think it was probably Carlos and Henry that put two and two together that his internal organs, I think, were not hurt. It was his legs, probably his right leg, because he was walking home when the car hit him. Mexicans have always been generally accepting of their fate, much more so than Europeans, generally. Europeans generally have been more demanding. But how demanding you are of institutions depends on your socioeconomic level. The higher, the more demanding you are, or the more you expect. So I was deprived of knowing my dad on a one-to-one basis, and it's simply the recollections I have as a kid and at the barbershop and the things he left and what brothers and sisters have said. But the experience that we had in East L.A. was very formative in terms of exposure to different groups, and yet feeling good that we were Mexicans, no chip on our shoulder, never had a

chip on my shoulder and never had people put me down because I was Mexican, because how could an Italian kid put me down, or a Jewish kid put me down? I wouldn't put them down. The first clear sweetheart I had was Betty Richland. She was a Jewish girl, and it was very clear to me that we could only be very good friends, because I forget how she told me. We were talking, because by this time I was sixteen or seventeen, and she said, "Of course you know I've got to marry a Jew." "Yeah, I guess so. Right. What kind of a guy do you think you're going to like?" "Oh, whatever my parents say." And her parents did marry her to someone they picked, and she had three children, three or four children.

The guy became very active in politics in L.A. and had a contract for processing and selling meat to the City of Los Angeles, and they were very well-to-do. And one time when I was making a speech, running for the Board of Education in early 1967, because the elections took place in April and then the runoff in June, I was talking to a large group of about 150 or so, people at the Jewish Community Center in Encino--it's still there--and the Jewish community, which by now had made a pronounced move into the valley, out of East L.A. into West L.A. and the valley. As you're talking to the audience, looking around, establishing eye contact, I noticed that this lady was looking at me very intensely. Who is this lady looking intensely? And then after about the third time of a twenty-minute talk and then questions I said to myself, "God damn it, that's Betty. That's Betty." And then the talk was over, and people gathered around to ask other questions, and this lady kind of wiggled her way through, this charming-looking, lovely looking lady wiggled her way through, and then she finally came up to me and she said, "Do you happen to remember me?" I said, "Betty. How could I forget?" [laughs]

So we exchanged telephone numbers and about two weeks later I went to visit her at her home, a nice home in Encino, and so she told me her life story of how her parents had

picked her husband. "Well, did you love him?" And it's a very Jewish expression. I go like this, the head to the side and hands up. "He was nice. He's taken very good care of me. He's a nice man."

Espino

That was your first love, your first high-school girlfriend?

Nava

Yes. Right. So we grew up in that United Nations as I have come to put it.

Espino

So that was one of the influences on your life, the school and the community that you lived in. You were also going to talk to me a little bit about your mother's conversion to the Protestant--

Nava

Oh, yes. Let me go and get some tea.

Espino

Okay, let's get back to--

Nava

So we went to St. Anthony's Catholic Church, not my dad, of course, and Carlos now and then. I don't remember about Henry; I was too young. At this time we had moved into our house at 609 Achandia Street, across from Prospect Park and Bridge Street Elementary School, where most of us went. Anyway, Mother had made friends, because we have moved back from, we called it the West Side. We moved back into East L.A. Oh, her name was Cloe, remember? I couldn't remember it the other day, C-L-O-E, Cloe, and Cloe went to a Pentecostal church not very far away and persuaded Mother to go with her to it. And Mother loved it, because they sang a lot, and they had a very crude little simple hymnal with music on

it. I think we have a copy of it. They sang songs, and Mother loved to sing, and Mother also loved to dance, and I think that was one of the things that Dad probably liked about her, that she was very lively that way, because he was on the solemn side, staid, thoughtful.

And Mother was--I can still remember some of the songs that Mother sang, most of a song, not all of it, and sometimes I catch myself singing them. Anyway, she loved that singing, and some of the people who got carried away by their spirit so to speak, then came out into the aisle and jumped and danced and knelt, because they felt possessed by their love of God, and Mother thought that was all very lovely. And she got some of us to go with them, and I didn't like all that stuff. And besides that, since we lived across the street from a Presbyterian church, and I don't remember just how we got related to that church, we started going to the Presbyterian church, but only after Mother broke with the Catholic Church, and she wanted us to go with her to the Pentecostal church.

She broke with Catholicism because she came to realize that it was not really spiritually oriented towards love for each other and helping each other in life like she said Jesus taught, because what impressed her about the spirit of community in the Pentecostal church was the fact that one day a week, I think it was after the evening service on Thursday, people were invited to go down below the church, which had an enormous gathering hall, and get food or clothing or small home-furnishing pieces like chairs that other members of the church had brought in to give away. It was kind of like a Goodwill repository. So Mother picked up canned food. I remember that she almost always brought some corned beef. I think someone there had a connection with the corned-beef industry. And Mother thought this was really the love of God expressed every day, and so this was on Thursdays.

So she got into a conversation with the priest in St. Anthony's, who turned out to be a Spanish priest. It's been true

historically that in Latin America most of the priests have been Italian-born or Spanish-born, and that's true today. Latin American countries don't produce their clergy; Spain and Italy export them. Anyway, I mean, it was no problem at the time, because everything was in Latin, a universal tongue. Now, Mother said to us one time that she went into detail about what happened, that she expressed the view to the priest that that parish might want to consider doing the same thing, because some members of the parish were comfortably set, Mother knew, and others not so, but that was true in the other church. "What other church?" And so they got into a very intense discussion or debate, and the priest was very harsh with her about attending a Protestant church and threatening the spiritual welfare of the family and so forth.

So Mother, who was a very gentle person but a very determined person, just reminded him, "But Father, Padre, we are worshipping the same God, and we're praying to the same God, and there can be no harm in that." "Yes, there is," blah, blah, blah, blah. And the priest as it turned out was very autocratic in his manner as well as in his point of view, and so he made some remarks that aggravated Mother to the point where Mother said, "Well, Father, look at me well. Mireme bien," which is kind of an affront to a figure of authority. "You are looking at me and my children for the last time," and didn't say any more. "No dije mas," and she left him just standing there, and whereas she could not persuade us to go to the Pentecostal church, she said, "Well, then, go to the Presbyterian church." And she started going to the Presbyterian church with us as well, but she kept going to the other church on Thursdays, because the main day for the Presbyterian church was on Sunday.

You had Bible studies in the morning starting at nine-thirty, and then a morning service was started at eleven that went until twelve, and then after the service everybody, about 150 people I think, all Mexican Americans, because the church

service was in Spanish, gathered outside in the garden of the church. The church was on a corner, and it had a garden, and people then just talked and had time visiting with each other for a half hour or forty-five minutes. Then everybody went home.

Espino

Do you remember feeling any feelings of loss or sadness when you left the Catholic Church? You probably were very small, but--

Nava

No feeling whatsoever, because the Catholic Church in the vague memories I have was that you just went in and you sat down, and the priest said some things that I did not understand, and some smoke was blown around, and he was always getting up and kneeling and then going--and then you knelt. It's just nothing. It didn't mean anything to me. And, of course, at that time I was young enough so that one could hardly have expected me to understand what was going on. There were some remarks made in Spanish, and that was about it. But the church service itself was in Latin. And in contrast, there were so many activities in the Presbyterian Church, which is part of the social ethos of the Presbyterian movement which arose in Scotland, and it reflected Scottish experiences with the dominating, oppressive, violent English domination of Scotland, bloody, bloody, bloody domination, and it must be from that kind of social context that self-help, self-reliance, mutual help and concentration on personal development became part of Knox's--the clergyman--teaching, sermons that gave rise to Presbyterianism, because Presbytery is a unit like accounting, but it's a unit within which there are several autonomous churches, all raising money on their own. There's no papacy. There's no King George VIII, no government-support. It's yourself. And the Presbytery then gathers together once a year or whatever or something like

that to discuss and debate theology and orthodoxy and things defining that approach to the worship of God.

So the church that we attended was four stories high in East L.A., cellar, upstairs, sanctuary--well, two stories above the ground, but there was another floor beneath the ground with a lot of rooms and a kitchen and a huge social hall, a social hall about the floor area of this house. It was supported by other Presbyterian churches that must have gotten the money together to build this great big building, which ultimately after one of the minor earthquakes was declared unsafe, and the brick building was demolished. So the Divine Savior Presbyterian Church on the corner of Bridge and Echandia one block off Brooklyn Avenue, now called Cesar Chavez, now is a one-story building. We have pictures of the old building, and it had provisions for all kinds of youth activities, all devised to develop self-reliance, independence, and desire to improve, those three things.

And the concentration on youth activities, counseling, health counseling for girls, health counseling for boys, and the group that gathered the young people was Christian Endeavor, CE it was called, Christian Endeavor, and we had our own little chapel like where we would have our own services and where we elected officers. This is all the kind of stuff I grew up with, you see, and boy-and-girl officers. Then we had also summer camps where young people of other Presbyterian churches, Spanish-speaking Presbyterian churches, gathered at a campground in San Dimas near Pomona. I think we were there for just two weeks, but it was a very, very impressive annual thing, and I'm sure that a lot of the young boys and girls ultimately married. They met each other at summer camp. So the church had a choir. I sang in the choir, Lola sang in the choir, Rosemary sang in the choir, Daniel sang in the choir, and so every now and then the Presbyterian ministers arranged so that the choirs sang at some other church, and so you got a feeling of community, and this sheltered us from

what might have been discrimination, because we had our own society.

And to the extent that I remember it so clearly today, that at a certain time of the year, by arrangement with the ministers, we went skating to the Presbyterian Church of Pasadena [on Colorado Blvd.], which is still there, and under one of the adjacent buildings, like our church for all kinds of activities, there was this huge skating rink, roller-skating rink, and so we went to skate there, and it was skating day so that young people from the church there were also skating there. They were all Anglo kids, most of them blond, and we were all skating around kind of looking at each other, oddball, but the idea was to get us to blend, to mix, and so in time that came to make all the Nava children, and I think it was true for the children in our church, feel equally comfortable with Americans as we called them. "Es Americano. Yo soy Mexicano." Because we saw them under positive circumstances, and so this was very, very formative.

Our minister [Hubert Falcon] was not, I think, a great intellectual person, but he was a good minister, and his wife [Lupita] was the sparkplug of the family, and they shaped several hundred young people during the years that they were at that church. [laughs] And Hubert Falcon, the minister, was an excellent P.R. guy, because he contacted corporations and Anglo or American ministers and got them to give things to the church, okay. That was, I think, his forte. He was a great politician within the Presbyterian church, and he had two brothers. Both of them became Presbyterian ministers, and one got a church in Covina, and the younger one, Dan Falcon, got a church I don't know where, somewhere in Greater L.A.

Espino

Okay, we're back.

Nava

And it's clear in my mind as I recollect things that the civic-centered secular-religious education helped to explain later on why I was persuaded to be a candidate for the school board, very clearly. In other words, it was a feeling that this was a good thing to do and I owed it to the community, because we had had a very good educational experience. I remember Bridge Street School. I remember some of the elementary teachers. I remember Mrs. Benton, who when we moved to West L.A. near the Coliseum gave me a quarter, which today would be like giving me a dollar, and this was elementary, this was a lot of money, and she just put her hand on my shoulder the last day. Now the teacher's not supposed to touch a child, but at that point things were different. So she put her arm around my shoulder and gave me a hug and said--I've never forgotten, and it's been formative--she said, "Julian, whatever happens, always try to do your best." And I've thought about that over and over again since then and how farsighted that simple remark was. "No matter whatever happens, always try to do your best."

And I remember Mrs. Aukie. She was a great big, to me at least at that time--she must have been six-feet, big, husky, not fat, not slender, stout. She would have been an excellent running back on a football team. She spoke with a slight accent, which I didn't really recognize, everybody spoke with an accent. Italians spoke with an accent, Jews, everybody else. But one day Mrs. Aukie caught me making some remark to some girl next to me. I don't remember what I was asking her. I probably asked her something or other, "What page are we on?" or whatever. And then Mrs. Aukie boomed out, because, boy, she boomed, "Julian, come forward." So I was, oh, my god. So I went up to the front of the class and she said, "Assume the position." So I bent down and grabbed my ankles, and then with her hand she swatted me. It wasn't so much a blow. It was more like a push, which launched me about ten feet forward. I didn't fall, I just ran. Then I stood up, turned around with great big wide eyes, and she said, "Julian,

heard that all music is A, A, B, A, okay, and I remember the Finnish National Anthem.

Espino

Incredible.

Nava

And the other teacher, Mrs. Strong, she was kind of roly-poly and very jolly. She was, I think, the next year, because you had one teacher for a year. And Mrs. Strong on Fridays would--she came from the South, and she had us learn Southern songs. She would repeat them and then we would sing it, because again, 90 percent of the kids in that particular elementary school were Mexican kids.

Espino

Ninety percent?

Nava

Yes, 90 percent, because we didn't encounter the others until junior high. That's when we met the Italians and the Japanese and the Jews and the Russians, and then, of course, in high school. But Mrs. Strong taught us Southern songs, and then at one particular point on one Friday she turned to the class on her little piano bench, she spun around and she said, "How many of you know 'Alla en el Rancho Grande'?" and all the hands shot up. That song we knew. Okay. And so, "Okay, all together now, da, da, da, dont da da, bum, Alla en el Rancho Grande," and we all sang "Alla en el Rancho Grande" about three times, and then after which she said, "Okay, okay." And then she said, "You know, Spanish is a beautiful language. You're so fortunate." And so that was my impression of Spanish, and Mrs. Strong said it, and Mrs. Aukie, "Speak English, Julian, you're an American." And then Mrs. Benton when we were moving on, "Julian, no matter whatever happens, always try to do your best." And those three episodes comprise my elementary school education, and they

have stood me in good stead in each of the ways that they relate to being alive. I'm an American. Spanish is a beautiful language. Always try to do your best.

The school was in good condition. The teachers were excellent. Mrs. McDonald was the principal and if I remember right, I think it was every Monday in the morning all the children, about 400, because schools were of a civilized size at that time, gathered out in front in the yard, and then someone who was selected and recognized then led us in the Pledge of Allegiance. And I don't remember, but I think we tried to sing the national anthem, and someone played the piano, of course, and that was every, every Monday, and that's how the school week started. And I've always figured since how shrewd, how intelligent, how enlightened to bring these little Mexican kids into the mainstream; Bridge Street School. It's still there, and it's full of Mexican kids.

Espino

At the same time you were receiving an education from the church that was positive--

Nava

Yes, yes, sure.

Espino

--in the sense that you had a community. And everything was in Spanish, I'm assuming, at the church?

Nava

Yes, oh, yes, oh, yes.

Espino

So there was a place where you had value for being Mexican and for speaking Spanish, and a place where you knew this is the different situation, this is where I speak English.

Nava

Sure. Yes, and the minister, of course, used complicated words, not exceedingly complicated, but the vocabulary was directed to adults, and Dad never went to the church. He was an atheist, a non-believer, and Mother got along with that. But when he died, Mother had a memorial service for him in the church, and I have a photograph of--how I got that photograph I don't know--of his coffin down there in front, right below where the minister preaches, and flowers all over the place, and the church was full of people. There was room for about 300, and so Dad was in church. Yes.

Espino

Do you think that he would have--I mean, if he were alive to look upon that scene, what do you think he would have said, or how would he have reacted?

Nava

My God, I don't know. He probably would have been very logical and figured, well, let her have her way. Ya no importa. Ya no importa. But when Mother died, she told us, "I want to be buried in Forest Lawn on a slope facing Elysian Park, if possible under a tree there," and she told us where the slope was. So I didn't ask her, but one of the others asked her, "Y porque no cerca de Papa?" And she said, "Well, he did not believe in God, and this is where I want you to put me, para que veas." He did not believe in God. I don't know what else she said, but she must have implied, "So I don't want to spend eternity next to him. I spent a life next to him, but not eternity; he did not believe in God." Makes you think of her remark to the Catholic priest. [laughs] She was mild, but she was strong.

Espino

Well, she was raising several kids on her own after your father died.

Nava

Yes, oh, yes. Well, but we were raising each other.

Espino

Were you?

Nava

Oh, sure. In other words, Helen, the oldest woman, Lucy, everyone helped someone under them, and Rosemary, Honey as we called her then and now, was the youngest. She didn't have anyone else to take care of. But we all took care of each other, and we all helped with family chores. I learned how to make tortillas. We all took turns making tortillas before dinner so that there was a stack, and one episode--I'd eaten my tortilla a little bit too fast, so I wanted some more tortilla until I think it was Lola's turn or Lucy's turn to be making more tortillas, because they had to keep coming. So I turned to Daniel and said, "Daniel, lend me a piece of your tortilla." "Yeah, but you'll have to pay me back." "Of course. I'm just two away from having another tortilla." So he gave me a piece of a tortilla, and I said, "But that's not half of it." "No." "You're keeping the bigger half. Why don't you give me half?" And he said, "It's interest." "Interest?" "Yeah, you have to pay for the convenience. You ate yours too fast." [laughs] And so I've always remembered that Daniel was very business-oriented. So when I got my tortilla, I had to give him--and he was looking at me very closely--exactly one half of the tortilla. I had to pay him some interest for the convenience.

Espino

That's really funny.

Nava

[laughs] Interest for the convenience!

Espino

Well, I know we're living in different times today, but I still have to wonder how does a mom organize a family of eight

children just on a regular basis? Because it's so difficult for me as a mother of three just to get certain things like clothes in the hamper and dishes in the sink.

Nava

Everybody had something to do, and it was simple, but that is one thing that you had to do, and there was always somebody older than you to make certain that you did it.

Espino

It wasn't the mom. It wasn't your mother who was--

Nava

No, no, she couldn't. Well, to some extent, but it was a hierarchy, and so it was a very social structure. So we all had to wash our own clothes, because after we got back, after the frustrated departure it was a long time before we could afford to buy a washing machine. Maytag was the big brand at the time, and I think the next Maytag we bought, I think it was a used Maytag, so I got used to washing my socks, which got dirty and smelly, and shorts and shirts, and we all had to press our own clothes. It's kind of tricky to press a man's shirt. We don't do it now, because they don't need pressing, but I can press a man's shirt and not burn it. So everybody chipped in, in short.

Espino

Do you remember that the eldest two in the family, did they ever feel resentful or an undue burden because they were the next in line after your mother?

Nava

No. And I think it was due to--I'm guessing, but I believe it was due to Dad's character when he was still alive, and to Mother's character. For example, I never, ever saw them cross at each other. I never, ever heard them speak to each other in a raised voice, and there have been many times when I've

reflected on that, because Pat [Lucas Nava] and I every now and then speak to each other in raised voices, more so on her part, because that's her orientation, and I've started doing the same only because it doesn't do any good to not be, whereas if she yells then I will yell. But I've told her many times, "I don't want to be that way. Don't yell. So you're upset, well, identify the problem and solve it." But I guess in her family they yelled at each other, and we never did, we never did, and I think it was mostly Mom, because she was alive for most of the time. Dad affected Carlos and Helen and to some extent Henry, but then he left the scene, so it was Mother's mild manner, and we've passed Mother's approach on to the children, and I've never heard them talk to each other or to their spouse in a raised voice. We've also brought them up to help each other.

1.2. Session 1: Part 2 (July 21, 2009)

Espino

Some of the interviews that I've done have been with people about your same generation, and they talk about just the difficult time of the 1930s and '40s and how created a lot of domestic violence, alcoholism, and an unsafe feeling in the community, and what you're talking about is something really different, almost like a peacefulness in your home.

Nava

Yes. I think there's no doubt that it was peaceful, and again, I think it was Dad [Julian Nava] and Mom [Refugio Flores Nava] and their upbringing and their friends that were like-minded. I believe it was because they all had a pronounced sense of self-worth that led them to act in a way in keeping with being somebody of value, money having nothing to do with that, money having nothing to do with that. For example, I remember that the Bert Corona family was down and out like everybody we knew, and so the younger brother of Bert Corona [Horatio], who went on to become very prominent in public life, slept at our house for a while. He insisted on not

eating, although sometimes he would, and then he would go out to work, and this went on for several months when they had to move out of their house. I don't know where Bert lived, but the younger brother stayed with us, because he was a good friend of Henry [Nava]. They were the same age. And so it was a question of simply helping someone out that needed help, and we didn't think it was any out of the ordinary to help someone like that.

So in many respects the depression brought out the best and the worst, which is not surprising, and it was our link or our membership in the church community that kept us together and made all of us just simply take for granted that we were all going to graduate from high school. I mean, that's just like, well, what else is new? You get up in the morning, you graduate from high school, and I wasn't thinking of college at all, but Henry and Vera were. Carlos was already married and raising children, so Carlos was out of the question. But they were all busy working, and Henry had gotten married, and Lucy was the one who started taking college classes, and then Lola started taking night classes, and I did not think of going to college at all until military service, and then I became fully aware of the value of an education, because I enlisted in the Navy Air Corps, which meant that we had to study very hard a number of things having to do with airplanes, and so it was an intense education after high school.

But I left and joined the military when I was just barely seventeen, and I finished my military training coincidentally at the same time that I would have graduated from Roosevelt High School, and one of my older brothers or sisters, I don't remember who, applied for and made arrangements that as was common nationally, you get high-school credit for a certain amount of time for military service. So I remember being so proud to come home on leave--they gave you ten-day leaves at certain junctures--and graduate with my class at Roosevelt High School and walk across the stage of the

auditorium, which is still there, in uniform and receive a diploma and a handshake from the principal [Mr. Daugherty], who was a son of a bitch but a wonderful guy. He was just very demanding and very fair, but very demanding and very, very strict, and good at heart, but very demanding and very strict, so everybody called him a son of a bitch. But he was a wonderful principal, and the school was about one-third Jewish and about a fourth Japanese, and then Russians, Italians, and Mexicans. Mexicans were probably only 15 percent of the student body. So it was a school highly oriented around academics because of the demand of the Jewish community, and the principal went along with it, so it was a very academically oriented high school, very demanding, which was all very, very good.

But only after the military service did I realize that I wanted to get college training, because I wanted at that time to be a aviation mechanic, and that required a college degree, because the engines were extremely complicated and you had to get a college degree to become an aviation mechanic. What was it called? Oh, yes, you got an A-and-E license, which was a national license. You had to pass a very demanding test, as well as have educational qualifications, so that's when I started to go to community college, after the military service, and then one thing led to another, another episode, another chapter in my life, so to speak.

Espino

Do you think that your major role models were your older brothers and sisters, or people that you met in the community?

Nava

The older brothers and sisters, oh, yes, and the minister and his wife, Hubert Falcon and Lupita Falcon, they were the role models. I figured to be like them is to be a good person.

Espino

Did they have formal education?

Nava

Oh, yes, they had university education in Mexico. Oh, yes, both of them were very well prepared, as we say, preparados in Spanish. Yes, they're very well educated, and they imbued that especially to young people, because they were very, very, very astute in shaping the young people, the future congregation.

Espino

And in the church was there Bible study?

Nava

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes, Sunday morning Bible school for about forty-five minutes. It was always an episode to illustrate Daniel and the lions or David and Goliath or Joab, who never lost faith even after everything went wrong, God must know what he's doing, a lot of Bible stories all directed towards shaping character. And I don't know--by that time I was old enough to be aware--whether that kind of civic training or shaping took place in the Spanish-speaking Catholic churches. I'm unaware, unaware. Hopefully.

Espino

So you didn't travel in circles with non-Presbyterians?

Nava

Not much, not much. There was no need for it. You had friends at school, yes, but, for example, Betty [Richland], we could never date. We could never date because it just was verboten. I could go and visit her at her home, we would sit outside on the porch and talk, and by eight-thirty her mother would reach out and say, "It's time, Betty." "All right, Mother, I'll be right in," and just visit, and then, of course, we would meet in

school. I had some Russian friends and some Japanese friends, and I was so ashamed at the Japanese relocation. I was so ashamed for the United States, because maybe eight or ten guys or gals that I knew suddenly had to sell their business or give up their home, just pack up in some suitcases and move out and go to buses, just like that. And I just said, "What? What's going on here?" And I was too young to remember the relocation, repatriation, but for the relocation I was sixteen or seventeen. I sure saw that and said, "What are you going to do with your house?" "We don't know. We're just going to--we have to report by next Monday."

And one friend, Mitzi Itzihara was a friend at school, and the time came--maybe about three years later or two years later I met Mitzi again when I was attending East L.A. Community College, and I saw her walking down the hall. "Mitzi!" "Julian!" And we gave each other a hug, and by that time I had already one semester had become a member of student council by election, by election, and then the next semester it was a semester assignment. I ran for student body president, and so one of the perks was to have a secretary, and so I asked Mitzi, "Mitzi, would you be my secretary?" "Yeah. What's involved?" "Hell, I don't know. That means that you'll be able to write some letters for me or people send letters addressed to student body president, you can do whatever secretaries do," and so that was Mitzi Itzihara, and we never spoke about the relocation, never spoke about it. I didn't ask her, and she never said a word, so I don't know whether she went to Manzanar or probably why send you to Idaho or Montana when Manzanar is right here? And she was a lovely, sharp, nice, pleasant--Mitzi Itzihara. I saw her walking down the hall. "Mitzi!" [laughs]

And that semester that I was elected student body president was the semester that I had some teacher in an English class--I've never remembered her name. I should have. I'm ashamed. So she saw in me qualities that might make it

possible for me to get accepted into Pomona College, where she went. "Pomona? Where's Pomona?" Because by that time I had decided to go on and probably to UCLA. She said, "Oh, I think you ought to try going to Pomona." "Where's Pomona?" "Well, it's a private school in Claremont." "And where's Claremont?" So she said, "That's the place I think you ought to go." So this was a young veteran, okay? I had G.I. Bill of Rights. I had some time left, because you got G.I. benefits according to the amount of service, the months of service. So she kind of like applied for me, and then I went to talk to the Dean of Students, Edward Sanders, just about fifteen, twenty minutes, and by this time I guess she had relayed Mexican American background, solid family, Protestant, military service, two years at East L.A. Community College, varsity tennis, elected to ultimately student body president, and Sanders must have said, "This is the kind of young man that we want," because Sanders later on came to tell me that Pomona had a policy of bringing in minority groups in numbers that could be absorbed, you see, and made to fit into the community. So at the time I went to Pomona I think there were three Mexican American kids. [laughs]

There were some other Hispanics from Latin America, maybe about five or six young men and girls from probably well-to-do families, because the tuition was expensive. So there were maybe about twenty Hispanics at Pomona, two or three of us Mexican American locals, and the G.I. Bill paid the tuition, and then Pomona paid in the extra amount. And many years later the time came to be where I was awarded an honorary doctor's degree by Pomona, a long time later, and elected, selected to be a member of the Board of Trustees, and I was on the Board of Trustees till I was seventy, and then you had to retire. So I'm still on the Board of Trustees emeritus, so I can go to meetings, but I've stopped going to meetings. It's too god-damned far. But it has always been very interesting to be that close to Pomona, because this English teacher at East

L.A. thought that's where I should go for further educational growth.

Espino

Sounds like you were an incredible leader in junior college. Were you also--when did you realize that you have these leadership skills?

Nava

You don't realize that.

Espino

When you started running for office, or when you started wanting to be--

Nava

You don't realize that, you just want to do it, because it's natural and because it's a good thing to do. The college was small. It was a new college, okay, in temporary buildings, wooden walkways from one building to the other, which were vital during when it was wet, because otherwise it was muddy. It was a simple, basic thing. While I was there on the student council or president, I don't remember, we picked our colors, green and white, because there were a number of Irish veterans that were there, a large number of veterans and they liked green and not blue, that's English. [laughs] "All right, there's green in the Mexican flag. All right." So I put in green and white, and then our mascot was an Alaskan husky, which are white, and somebody connected with the college gave us a beautiful dog, a white husky, which I thought was kind of odd for Southern California to have a husky, but hell, why not?

And so these things, you just develop into a leadership role because there are things to do, which was, looking back, now that you pose the question, it was natural, because it was like church. You did something which had to be done, and if someone else wasn't doing it, why, let's do it. Se acabo. So I

don't think you decide to have leadership qualities, and whatever they are depends on the context, conditions that make what you propose or advance acceptable.

Espino

Some people take on leadership roles because they're moving up towards some--they have an ultimate goal, so they take these little steps. Other people like do exactly what you're describing, and that is see a problem and take the initiative and want to address it, and so they take on leadership in that regard.

Nava

Yes. I wasn't thinking of a stepping stone. It was simply, here we are. Hey, let's do this, and do it. Like the big event for a junior class at Pomona was the junior prom, and we didn't know what kind of a symbol to use for the prom. So I said, "Well, what about getting a manzanita tree and putting it in a frame?" "What's a manzanita tree?" I said, "Well, it's a very lovely tree. It's got a red bark," and so about three or four of us in a car went up towards Padua Hills, there's a theater there. I've got to go there sometime again; it would bring back many memories. We cut down a branch of a manzanita tree. Now it's illegal. I don't think it was illegal then, but now it is illegal, illegal to cut down a manzanita tree. So we got it, brought it down and cut it up and nailed it and made a nice frame, like about four-feet wide and three-feet high, and then this tree was in there, crazy now that I look back on it, but then it was the symbol for our junior prom. So even at Pomona to a limited extent it was an expression of natural, "Let's do it. Let's do something."

But all the students at Pomona were so smart. They were so smart, not to mention Harvard. It's humiliating to some extent, embarrassing, but then again it was church came back saying, "You can do this." I remember like it was yesterday praying every night in so many words, "God, help me with just

one more day." I remember that. "God, help me just one more day," and then Monday night, "God, help me get through Tuesday." Wednesday the same thing until I got into the loop, so to speak, because all the students there were pre-trained to go there. [At Harvard] they all went to finishing schools, so they had a good idea of what the prof was going to talk about, so what he talked about made sense to them, and to me the concepts were new. I had to go to the library and find out, what's this reference? Because when you wrote an exam, then you had to write about things up to par, so it was an ordeal in every respect.

Espino

You never felt like you wanted to give up, quit?

Nava

No. Pride. Pride, and, "I can do it if I just--." I couldn't try harder. I was already trying as hard as I could. "If I just keep at it." Yes.

Espino

So that was the academic side. What about the social aspect?

Nava

There was almost no social side, because I had no money. I never took a girl out on a date, although there were girls that wanted to go out, not many but two or three, and said, "I'll get the tickets." And then I came up with some excuse for why I couldn't, which really was, I'm ashamed. So we were just friends on campus, because those were Radcliffe students that were free to attend Harvard in every respect, but they were Radcliffe students. There was no social life except your roommates and a couple of other friends in the dorm, and we would spend, for example, almost without exception Sunday afternoon about two or three hours listening to the Boston Symphony Orchestra, which was put on the radio, and that went on for about two and a half hours, and they played some

[classical] composition. Most of the other students could understand the music, and I learned to understand it.

[laughs] I remember some intense discussions over Beethoven's Seventh Symphony between two guys, one who said, "Karl Munch," a German composer, "he has command of the seventh." And the other guy said, "Oh, you're crazy. [Arturo] Toscanini plays it the way it should be played." "What do you mean?" Na, na, na, na. And I'm just listening. Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, and then it was being played by the Boston Symphony. And he said, "All right, after it's over I'm going to go and get my recording, and then I'll just show you what Toscanini did in the second movement. It's much too energetic." And the other guy said, "Of course, it's crazy Italians. What else do you expect?" You know, this kind, and so I'm very familiar with Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. Oh, dear. But the social experience then was with the peers, and some of them dated, but not most of them, mostly because you didn't have time for a date. To give up a whole evening just to be with a girl? No way. So there were some girlfriends, but no, nothing serious.

Espino

And in Pomona that was the same situation?

Nava

Yes, except that at Pomona I fell in love with a girl, Sue Sizer, and she with me, and she was one year ahead of me, and so on her graduation her parents, her mom and dad, came out from Michigan. Well, at that time they were living actually in Illinois, in Winnetka, Illinois, which is kind of like a Beverly Hills. I didn't know it at the time. And they came out to visit, and at that time Sue and I were just very much, we were already very much in love, but we had not spoken about marriage. I think that she spoke to her folks about Julian, and they came out to not just be there for her graduation but to meet Julian, understandably. And so they were nice, a very

nice man and a very nice mother, and we arranged that that Christmas Sue would be already back in Michigan. Their real permanent home was in [Harbert,] Michigan.

I would visit them for Christmas, so I took a train back to Winnetka. They had two homes, Winnetka and Michigan. They left Winnetka and then moved to Michigan when he retired from Marshall Field's. I learned that he was one of the half a dozen vice presidents of Marshall Field's. Marshall Field's is a very, very big department store, privately owned, and it's still there. Now it's probably public, but at that time it was a company, and Larry [Sizer] was one of the V.P.'s. So I spent a week and a half back there with her family, including her brother and her younger sister, and it turned out that Sue wanted to get married then, and then we would drive back to Pomona during my last semester, and then I would graduate, and then we would do whatever we wanted to do.

But she knew by that time I wanted to go to graduate school, and she knew by that time, too, that I had applied to Harvard, and Harvard doesn't give notice until early June for September. And she knew it was very important, because the history professor at Pomona, Professor Hubert Herring, H-e-r-r-i-n-g, very well known in the field--I took him for a class, and he said, "Yes, I think you could be a good university professor, and for that, of course, you'll have to get a Ph.D." "Well, where shall I go?" He said, "Well, of course, there are a number of excellent universities here in California, but it would be very good if you got out of California." He used to be a minister, and he left the ministry and became a history professor and wrote a couple of very good books on Latin America, Professor Hubert Herring. And he said, "You ought to go to Harvard." "Harvard?" "Yes." He said, "I'll write a letter of recommendation for you." He said, "You could go to Berkeley or to UCLA, but I think you ought to get out of California to broaden," blah, blah, blah, blah. And so I said, "Jeez." By this time I knew of Harvard. And he said, "I know a professor

there. The professor there is Clarence Haring," H-a-r-i-n-g, the English spelling. Huber Herring was German, H-e-r-r-i-n-g. "I know Clarence," he said, "and at Harvard they rely a lot on personal recommendations."

Already another professor of history at Pomona wanted me to go to Yale for the same reasons, "Get out of California." And so he went to the extent of getting a Yale application, and Huber Herring had gotten a Harvard application, and I've always thought it was an example of the differences between the two. The Yale application was about eight pages, let's see, two pages folded inside of each other, so that would be eight pages, all this stuff they wanted to know about you, because it would be eight faces, and the Harvard was one side of one page, name, address, blah, blah, blah, where you went to school, what other degrees, and then space for one paragraph, not much space, "Why do you want to come to Harvard?"

So Hubert Herring said, "You write it, why you want to go to Harvard." But one of the spaces there was to list other universities to which you had applied, and so he said, "In your paragraph, whatever you say or however you want to put it, say, 'I am applying to only Harvard, because only Harvard will meet my needs.'" And I said, "I shouldn't apply to Yale in case Harvard doesn't come through?" And he said, "No." He said, "The universities all check with each other on who has applied for a Ph.D. program, and if you are shopping, you drop in estimation." So I wrote down, "I am applying to Harvard University only, and I have concluded looking at the curriculum and the professors that only Harvard meets my professional needs for becoming a professor of Latin American History." This is about four lines, that was it. And I sent that off, and I told Sue, I said, "Sue, I don't have any assurance of where I'm going, and I think we should wait until I have something to give to us."

And she pleaded and pleaded but then finally agreed, and we talked about this with her parents as well, which was natural

for me to talk about it with the family. And so I took a train with other Pomona students coming back to California, because at that time the train stopped in Claremont. I don't think they do now. They probably shoot straight through to L.A., but I don't know. But at that time they stopped at Claremont, and I rode on the way back with some guy, I don't remember his name, but he liked music, too. So he started humming a tune, and I said, "Oh, that's the second movement of the seventh, isn't it?" And he said, "Oh, you know the seventh?" I said, "Well, a little bit." So the Seventh Symphony in the Second Movement it has two themes. Beethoven was a rebel. He didn't follow the rules. Much of his music shocked musicians. It has two themes, and the two themes kind of interweave with each other, and so he said, "I'll take the A, you take the B." And so we [laughs] [imitates humming back and forth], and then there were some other guys on the train who said, "Hey, can we join in?" "Yes, sure." These were all Pomona students. This was before Harvard, mind you, where then those two guys got into the argument as to who performed the seventh the best.

So I came back and Sue and I were writing to each other. Late in May she wrote me a "Dear John" letter. "Dear Julian, I don't know how to tell you, but I've fallen in love with Charles Chapman and we have decided to get married. I'm so sorry," blah, blah, blah, blah. And I was [makes sound], because at this time I was getting ready for final exams. And I went to the Dean of Students and told him what had happened, and I said, "I've got to go back and find out what happened." "Do you have the fare?" I said, "No, I don't." He said, "Well, we have a special emergency fund at Pomona. I'll get you the round-trip train tickets." So I went back to visit Sue, and it was awkward to put it mildly. She had no idea; I just showed up. But I did call her parents and told them, "I'm arriving on the so-and-so. Would you please come out to meet me?" And their home was only about a subway ride into town. So they met me and brought me out, and I was there about four days, and we

talked very little about it, but it was quite clear she was going to marry this other fellow. And I had the feeling, they didn't say it, that her parents had mixed feelings and were sorry that she was not going to marry me, because we had hit it off. We just hit it off. So they saw me off to the train depot. Sue did not see me to the train depot, and I just gave him a very heartfelt handshake and a very long, strong hug to the mother, who corresponded, and it made me think, she's sorry, too. And I got on the train and came back and somehow got through the exams.

And not long after, I got a letter from Harvard, and then I communicated with her mother. I called her. By this time Sue had married this Charles and gone to live off I think in South Carolina somewhere, so she wasn't home. I called Kate and told her, "Kate, I just got this letter and I can't help but wanting you to know." "Oh, Julian, congratulations. Do write to us." And then I wrote to her when I was back, when I got to Harvard, and I described this very dismal-looking dorm room where I lived with Gus, Gus Liebenow, and he's a story in himself. So she wrote back and she said, "Describe the room to me," and then talked about her husband and the other two children. So I drew the room on a piece of paper, eight by eleven, and then attached papers on each of the four sides as if you were looking at one side, so you could kind of look down into it and you could see what the room was like, where the desks were and the door and the windows, and I even put the dimensions of the windows.

And so about three weeks later we got this great, big, soft package, and it was drapes for all the windows. She'd had drapes made for the windows, because they were odd-shaped windows, and so we got some brackets and we hung them up, and every now and then I wonder whether those drapes are still there. But she wanted to make me feel comfortable, almost as if to say, "I'm so sorry the way it worked out." And on two other occasions crossing the country I stopped off to

visit them. Sue, of course--by now she and her husband were in India. He got a job with the Foreign Service. They were living in India. So I would stop to visit their home. By now Larry had retired from Marshall Field's and they were living in a lakeside home in Michigan, and I almost felt like at home, talked to Kate about the roses. "Oh, I'll help you prune them." "Do you know how to prune roses?" "Yeah, I know how to prune roses." She says, "Well, you know, you have to be careful on just where." I said, "I know how to do it, Kate." "Okay, the shears are over there," because Mother [Refugio Nava] liked flowers, and trimming the roses you have to know where to cut. You can't just cut anywhere.

So that went on and about by the time I'd finished Harvard, with one year in Venezuela doing research work and then another year back to write it up, and then back, then teaching in Puerto Rico two years, towards the end of which we heard word that Mother had terminal cancer, pancreatic cancer, then I came back to California, and she died about a month after. I'd bought a home and was still in touch with the Sizars. Kind of weird, huh? I'd never asked about Sue.

Espino

And she never asked about you.

Nava

Probably not, probably not. And her younger sister came out to visit with a friend of hers, and they stayed--I had a three-bedroom place, and I had a roommate, and so the two girls stayed in one of the bedrooms, and we just drove them around L.A., the harbor, Mount Wilson, and she wanted to see Pomona College, Pomona College. They were here for about four days and then they flew back. So gradually the letters became more and more infrequent and finally lost contact.

Espino

Did you also write to your family, to your mom or your siblings?

Nava

Oh, sure. Oh, regularly, regularly.

Espino

Did you keep any of those letters, or do you think that someone has them in a box someplace?

Nava

Only Lucy would have, and she's passed away. I don't think Lola and I'm almost sure Rosemary or Daniel did not. But I regularly wrote to Mother, in Spanish, of course, and I was so sorry--Mother did go to my graduation at Pomona. I've got some pictures of us there. She didn't understand except it was all very, very impressive, because the main auditorium, called Bridges Hall, it's a huge auditorium. So she was sitting there, and she must have been just awed by the whole thing. I've always been so sorry that we couldn't afford to fly her back to see my graduation at Harvard in these scarlet robes, and the speaker, the commencement speaker was the German chancellor [Conrad Adenaur], everyone called him "Der Alte," the boss. What in the hell was his name? Der Alte. He was the first postwar elected chancellor of Germany, and he spoke in German, instantly translated, and he's the guy that really brought the German people together, and he was reelected, I think, two times, so people called him Der Alte. But he was no longer chancellor when he came to speak to Harvard in '55, but everyone still referred to him as Der Alte. Yes, it was very impressive.

Espino

Looking back, that's amazing, graduating from Roosevelt, going to East L.A. College, then getting accepted to Pomona, on to Harvard, one of not even a handful--

Nava

I don't think there was another Mexican American at Harvard in the Ph.D. program. I kind of looked around, because by this time I was kind of attuned to these kinds of things. I never saw another Mexican American at Harvard.

Espino

Did you feel the incredibleness of what you were doing?

Nava

Yes, oh, yes.

Espino

Did you feel it at that time?

Nava

Yes. I would look around every now and then and ask myself, what am I doing here? What am I doing here? For example, because I was in need of spiritual support, I always went to chapel Sunday morning, and it was a very, very old church, and it had a phenomenal organ. By this time I was into music. I appreciated Bach. And my roommate and I went to church, because the sermons were very intellectual, and the music was fantastic. It was a small choir, only about twenty, but it was very, very good, all volunteer music students, and everything there was first rate, absolutely first rate, so the music of the choir was absolutely first rate, the organist was absolutely first rate.

So Richard White and I would go to church, and then after the church was finished [hums music], church service over, everybody would mill out. Men, women, and children would mill out, and then about six or eight of us would wind our way towards the front, and the organist, a Harvard student, after everybody had cleared out and then someone closed the doors, he would then start to play other music, organ music, serious organ music which he wanted to play, and it was

phenomenal, because he would where appropriate pull out the stops, which gives more power, [hums music] twenty minutes on one composition. Then someone would say, "What about this piece?" "Okay, I haven't played that in a while," and he would play for about another hour and a half, just because it was fun, and we would just sit there and take all this in. Then finally he'd say, "The hell with church. The hell with it. I give up, I'm tired." "Ah, just one more. What about this or that?" So that was Sunday till about two o'clock in the afternoon.

But I was aware that everything was absolutely tops and that I was doing that work, because these other people, they didn't give a damn that I was Mexican. I was just a student, fellow student, and you're doing what everybody else is doing, and so that's always made me sometimes hard on Mexican American students, because I say it from the inside, because I feel if I did it, don't tell me you don't want to, or don't tell me you can't if you want to. I did it, and I'm no genius, so don't give me this crap about high schools not being in the condition they ought to be, or teachers that are insensitive. And I would give talks like this sometimes when I was on the school board and going out to visit community groups. I would just say, "You've got the best schools in the world here. Yes, we have shortcomings. Yes, I'm sorry we don't serve tamales for lunch. Yes, blah, blah, blah. But there's nothing here to stop you from being whatever you want to be. Only you can determine what your children are going to be. How long do they watch television at night? Why don't you simply say, 'You'll watch television for one hour after you've done your homework,'" those kinds of talks.

And one time when I was giving a talk during the walkouts in a park, someone threw an orange at me, and I saw it coming. Luckily it was far, and he was about at the far end of the kitchen over there. He wound up and he threw this orange at me and I caught it, and I said, "You're a little high. Bring it down more." And then I kept on talking. "You care enough to

throw an orange at me. Do you care enough about getting a B in algebra?" So that was much of my acting on the school board, trying to energize Mexican American families to get more out of public education. But then we'll probably talk about the walkouts later. But my impression at Pomona and at Harvard was there's just about nothing you can't do if you decide to practice, practice, and practice, and study, and study, and study, and so there's no reason in the world except our cultural hangups, and much of it the Catholic Church, that keeps Mexican Americans from roles in society commensurate with their ability. It's certainly not schools. Those teachers care, and when they don't care in many cases it's because they're tired of teaching kids that don't really appear to be motivated. And I often would say, "No one can really teach you. They can help you learn."

Espino

It seems like you were very lucky in your educational experience in that you didn't experience discrimination and outright racism and harsh language about being Mexican, like stories that I've heard over time. Even my own mom, who was tracked when she was at King Junior High School, the teacher separated I think it was their English class into the kids that were going to go to college and the kids that weren't, and all the kids--

Nava

Well, was that made known at the time?

Espino

It wasn't a public--it wasn't an official written policy, but it--

Nava

But were the kids told that, in effect?

Espino

Yes, she was told that. She was put in the group that was not going to go to college, and all the Mexican kids were put in that group.

Nava

I was tracked. I was tracked at Roosevelt, sure. I took auto shop, wood shop, electric shop. I took all these classes that were in effect tracked. I also took English and U.S. history, and I was tracked. That's why I didn't really awaken to learning, so to speak, until I was in the Navy, when I realized that there are all these other things.

Espino

So if you would have wanted to apply to a university from high school, you would not have had the classes?

Nava

I would not have qualified. I would not have qualified. And I remember very clearly that when I was facing the draft, Henry and I talked about it. He was already in the Navy, but we talked about it and he said, "Go into the Navy." "Why?" "It's cleaner," he said. "Everything is ordinary. You're not crawling through the mud, and it hard to tell whether you will be out in action, military action, because there are so many things to be done." But he said, "Go enlist in the Navy," and he said, "Take academic classes, which will help you be able to pick a more desirable line of duty." "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, geometry, physics, algebra." And I said, "Oh, I don't think I can get those classes." So he came to Roosevelt High School and made an appointment with the counselor and told the counselor, "Next semester I want my younger brother to take these--," solid course they're called, "--solids." And the counselor, who knew that I was coming and so he already had my cume card, and he said, "Oh, well, he can't take these classes." "Why not?" Henry asked. "Well, he hasn't got the courses that qualify him to take them." And then Henry told

him, he said, "That's a bunch of bullshit. I want my brother, who's going to go into the military in one semester, to take these classes." And the counselor told him, "It's not possible. I can't approve." And so Henry leaned over on the counselor's desk and grabbed the counselor's shirt and he said, "You're not hearing me. I want Julian to take geometry and algebra and physics next semester."

"Well, no one ever takes three together." And then he turned around to me and he asked me, "Julian, are you going to pass these courses?" "Yeah, Henry." He's my older brother. And so the counselor said, "Well, this is not--all right." So he signed me up for the three courses, and I got C's in them. The one that gave me the worst time was algebra, because it didn't make sense to me, but the physics I loved and the geometry I loved. Then the next semester I took Geometry II, Physics II, and Algebra II, and I passed them. So I went into the Navy and on the basis of that minimum number of solids that I had passed, I was admitted into the Navy Air Corps, and I was delighted, because by that time I'd made model airplanes. I think I showed you some of them in that album.

Espino

Yes, that's right.

Nava

We made model airplanes, and I wanted to be a flier, and right after we got in we went into boot camp in Tennessee. Why in Tennessee? Who knows? We were told that they didn't need fliers anymore, but they needed combat air crewman that helped maintain an airplane and ran the machine guns in case of encountering enemy planes, so that's what I was trained for and graduated. But I learned that physics was fun and so was geometry, although algebra was so arbitrary I just, even today--a quadratic equation, what in the hell is that? I remember the term and that's about it. But Henry insisted that I take those courses, and rammed them down the throat of

this counselor with the threat of physical violence. And, of course, Henry was so--he wasn't large, but he had just a tremendous build. He was a gymnast.

So, yes, I was tracked, but affectionately, friendly. It wasn't someone setting out to--but I've always been grateful that I had all those shop classes. The time came when I had enough carpentry skills to build a home. Look, I'll show it to you. Oh, I can't. So Rudy [Acuña] and I will have arguments, affectionate arguments over this. "Oh, shit, stop complaining. It happens to Italians, it happens to the Irish, it happens to Swedes." "Dumb Swede" was a figure of speech that was common in the United States during the latter nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century, dumb Swedes, and they were tracked. It was a realistic though maybe misguided conclusion on the part of educators that not everybody was going to go to college.

Espino

Okay, we were talking a little bit about the board of education. I'm not sure if that recorded, but I wanted to get back to your experience in the military and what that was like for you.

Nava

Well, the military experience was my declaration of independence, because it was the first experience among non-Mexicans, because I had a sheltered life in the barrio for the most part, and it was the first time that I concluded that I could do anything anybody else could do. That's why I call it the declaration of independence, because among the boot camp experience were friends like Warren [Richardson], who asked me one time, "Well, what are you?" "What do you mean?" "Well, I'm Scotch Irish." "Oh. I'm Mexican." "I've never met a Mexican before." As it turned out, he lived in southwest L.A., and it might have been Hawthorne or Inglewood or somewhere where there were no Mexicans living there. There was a small colony of Mexican Americans in Santa

Monica, and then you had to go down to San Pedro and not much in between, not along the coast.

Anyway, "Oh, Mexican. I never met a Mexican before." And so we went on with whatever we were doing, but we became very good friends, went out together when we had liberty, and I met later on in a training session for learning how to maintain an airplane I met some Poles from the Chicago area, and most of them, not all, most of them were kind of brutish. They were always getting into fights, and I had not had that kind of experience. Now, of course, we were trained to fight each other, and I had learned how to become violent, okay? In one episode, our trainer put boxing gloves on us, larger than smaller so that you weren't really about to hurt each other, but you could really knock each other around, and he always pitted a large person versus a smaller person, and he said, "On purpose, because the smaller person has to get used to getting beat up by a larger person, and the larger person has to realize that sometimes a smaller person can beat the shit out of him."

And so on one occasion that I'll always remember, I was pitted against a Swede who was taller and larger than I was, and he only fought for about, let's see, a clock. Oh, we only fought for about three minutes, maybe four minutes, and I figured that this guy's going to beat the hell out of me, so there's only one thing to do. So when he said, "Okay," so we went at each other, and I went at this other fellow ferociously, just hitting him so fast, as fast as I could so that he really could never get his act together. If he did, he probably would have knocked me down, but he never did knock me down, and I didn't knock him down either, because he outweighed me. But I was really beating on him. And then he said, "Okay, that's it." And I remember the expression on this Swede's face of surprise, and as the sergeant, he was a sergeant, led me aside and started taking off the gloves, he had a very big wicked smile on his face as if to say, "Good work." He didn't say anything more,

just a big smile, and then the boxing went on for about forty-five minutes.

But I remember this Pole, his name was Vladislav Murivinski, and he was very surprised because I could pronounce his name. "How come you can pronounce my name? How many Poles have you known?" I said, "I never met a Pole before." "Well, how come you can say Vladislav Murivinski?" And I said, "Well, I learned Spanish first, and then to me English was a new language which sounded like shit, and so I had to figure out how to say things in English." So later on during the course of our training we got into an argument, and Vladislav already had the reputation of beating up some of his fellow students, mostly black eyes and bloody noses, but he was a violent kind of a guy. He always wanted to have his way. So I don't remember what I said to piss him off, but he said, "Come over here, Nava. I'm going to kick the shit out of you." So he got up close to me. He wasn't much taller than me, but he was a little taller and he outweighed me, which is the important part. And I said, "Leave me alone. What have I done to you? Leave me alone." And he said, "You're going to get it." And I said, "Vlad," because we called him later on for short instead of Vladislav, Vlad. I said, "Vlad, I know you're going to take me down, but before I go down I'm going to hurt you." And apparently no one had ever said anything to him like that. "Yeah?" And I didn't say anything more. So then he changed the subject and he went on to something else.

And two or three days later he said, "Hey, Tonto." They also called me Injun, which was a put down, Injun. And other guys called me Tonto, Tonto, for the Lone Ranger, because we were out in the sun so much I was brown, I was very brown. "Hey, Tonto. Let's go out for a beer." "Yeah, Vlad." So we went into town and had some beers, and so we became friends, and I guess, I'm guessing because I stood up to him and told him, "You'll take me down, but before you do I'll hurt you," and by that time we'd learned how to hurt somebody. So, yes, I'll take

him down, but so we became friends. I have a nice picture of Vlad in my family album. We became very good friends. But I learned that I could do what anybody else could do, because it didn't matter who you were. You could be a Swede, you could be a Pole, you could be a beaner--they sometimes called Mexicans beaners--or you could be a spaghetti. All that mattered was that you could do what you were supposed to do just right, because the time would come when someone would have to depend upon you, and we knew we would have to depend upon them, and all that mattered was, do they know how to do it? Okay, and so that was a very educational experience.

So that helps explain why by the time I got out and went to community college there was nothing I would not try to do if I wanted to do it, because I could do it. I remember another episode. We were in Oklahoma, and they always fed us very, very well, because we burned an enormous amount of energy, and they had some delicious hamburgers and malted milks. So I went to the cafe there, what did we call it where you could go and get food? We had a nickname for it. Anyway, I went up to order a malt and a hamburger, and there was this beautiful blond girl that came up to wait on me. I mean, taste differs, okay? But I thought she was beautiful, and she had blazing red hair. I just looked at her. We were the same height, but I just looked at her. She said, "And what's up, sailor?" And I said, "Hamburger. Make it a cheeseburger and a strawberry malt." "You got it." And then she yelled back, blah, blah, blah, blah, okay. My hand was on the counter and then she put her hand on mine, and she said, "I love your tan. Where'd you get it?" "I was born with it." They all had names, so whatever her name was, Mary whatever. "I was born with it, Mary. Of course it's a little bit darker now, because we're out in the sun a lot." And she said, "Oh, hell." She said, "I try to get a tan, I can never get a tan. You're lucky." And then with a wicked look she said, "Are you tan all over?" And I said, "Yeah. You want to see?" "Aw, get out of here." And then I said, and here's the punch

line, I asked her, "I love your red hair. Is your hair red everywhere?" And then she flushed, okay. She said, "Aw, you God damn swabbies. I think your malt is ready." And so she went over and she got my malted milk and the hamburger.

But that made a big impression on me, because I remember it now as I did when it happened. It was all right to be brown, you see. Some people like me because I'm brown, because almost everybody else was much blonder than I was, because not very many Mexican Americans were accepted into the Air Corps, because they had not had a brother who forced them to take these classes, for whatever that meant. Okay? Really what it meant was that you could figure things out. So I no longer had a complex about being Mexican, about appearance. I had learned that I could do anything that anybody else could do, and those two things shaped me, because no amount of education would have taught me that, although I had the basis for it already in church.

But from there we went to gunnery school, where we learned how to use a gun turret, which has two huge machine guns, fifty calibers. They're still used in the military, because they are so very, very powerful. They have shells that are about, well, bigger than the thumb, like a cucumber, and they'll go through just about anything. They'll hit a target a mile away, if you can take into account the wind and then raise up so that-- powerful, powerful. So we learned how to use these guns, and we shot in northern Florida in pine forests. We shot at moving targets that simulated the movement of a plane, another plane, and horrendous noise. You had earplugs on. And I became very good. In fact, in my class of about fifteen I was number one, because they later on looked at the target to see how many shells had hit it, and much of it is luck, but nonetheless I came out number one, which meant that once we were told what plane we were going to fly in I was so happy, because it was a great big four-engine bomber, rather than a patrol plane or a torpedo plane. They called torpedo

planes flying coffins for good reasons, or a dive bomber were also flying coffins.

President [George H.W.] Bush Senior flew a torpedo plane, and so I remember voting for him because I just figured anybody that has done that and has survived has my vote forever. I would have voted for him when he ran for reelection and Clinton beat him, but he flew a flying coffin. Anyway, I was relieved because I was going to be in a bomber, which has a front tail gun and a rear tail gun, one on top, two on the sides that could pretty much go practically straight down, because bombers carry a lot of bombs, and you don't want--if any one of them is hit they'll just [makes sound].

Four engines, so because I was number one in gunnery school I was able to pick any of the turrets except the one on top, which is reserved for the crew captain, right behind where the pilot and the co-pilot are, because then he can see everything above, out, and to some extent down, so that's where the crew captain is. So I picked the tail gun, which is often shot at by attackers, but you have a free rein. You can't see the airplane. The elevators are back there, so you can barely see, so you're sitting out in the sky. But the main reason I picked it was that it was the gunnery position that could jump out, bail out the quickest, because just out of the gun five feet there was an escape hatch. Why there was an escape hatch there I'm not quite sure, but there was an escape hatch there, so if the plane was struck and was going to go down, you had the best chance of getting out of the gun turret--you already had a parachute--and jumping.

The other guns all must have taken about maybe a minute to two minutes to get to an escape hatch. This was thirty seconds, so that's why I picked it. I have a picture of that gun turret. But we got assigned an airplane and learned everything about it and the crew, and you became like brothers with the crew. We were all young. Only the crew captain was maybe about eight years older, not quite that many but six years

older, and, of course, the pilots were probably a little bit older, but the pilots were young. Everybody was young. I don't think there was anybody on that plane over twenty-four, and everything we did, we did it over and over and over again. Everybody was good. They were so damn good at everything. We were just looking forward to being at war. Hah, how crazy can you be? But when you're almost eighteen you think you'll live forever and no one can hurt you.

Espino

Do you think you had some of that from having witnessed World War II, some desire to fight?

Nava

Oh, yes, we saw their movies. There were movies, and most movie theaters had news specials before the movie started. For about fifteen minutes it showed live action pictures, and this was Germany and also some of the Pacific. But by the time I got into the service, the war in Europe had ended, and now we knew we were going into the Pacific, so that's why it made sense for this bomber, because we were going to go on submarine patrol. That was going to be our assignment, submarine patrol. So we did a lot of that in the Caribbean. We'd go out for about six hours and everybody looking, everybody looking, and you didn't goof off because it was critical, so I was just sitting in my gun turret and looking down, and I would go in like this, and every now and then they would send out a sub to see if we would spot it, an American sub. So we were now ready to go, and we were down to our duffel bag, which is about four-feet long and you can hug it. Everything you own is in there. You just pick it up and go.

So we were down to our duffel bag, and we were in some base here near San Diego, because we were going out to the Pacific. And then this loudspeaker came on very loud, "Now hear this." And whenever you hear that you pay attention. "The war has ended. We just received word that Japan has surrendered

unconditionally, so hostilities are at an end." And then that was it, so we were not going to go, and we were so let down that a day or two later they gave liberty. So we went out, the crew went out together--you did everything together--and we got drunk with beer. We piled up beer cans into a pyramid on the floor. Then you had to go to the john every fifteen, twenty minutes, and you'd come back and drink some more beer, until finally someone goofed and they knocked the pyramid over and it all crashed down on the floor, and the lady at the bar got pissed off and she called the shore patrol, and the shore patrol, we heard them coming, and so we ran out of the bar and ran back to the base, jumping over some fences, and got back to the base safe and sound ahead of the shore patrol. But we were just so let down because the war had ended.

And by the time we went out, two or three days after the, "Now hear this," we learned that we had dropped an atomic bomb on two cities in Japan, which forced the Japanese Empire to surrender, and we learned from some Marines on the base, because Marines and sailors at that time were always together, that some of the Marines when they heard that news started to cry, because they knew if the war had not ended that they would not survive an invasion of the Japanese home islands. Much much later, I mean years later, somewhere or another I ran across commentaries that it was estimated we would have lost over half a million men invading the Japanese islands, because the entire Japanese population was alerted and trained to their level of ability to resist invasion, for the Japanese islands had never been successfully invaded. Only two times that efforts were made by Chinese emperors, and the Japanese held them off. But down to children were trained to do whatever they could, even if it was just throwing stones at Americans, and since there are, I don't know, a hundred islands in the Japanese islands, not that many but practically, it would have been just a slaughterhouse, and in the process we would have just killed half the Japanese population.

So whenever later on someone quizzed me about the inhumanity of dropping the atom bomb I said, "Well, you just don't understand the logistics of what would have happened if we had been forced to invade the Japanese islands," because in just seizing Okinawa, which made it possible to land B-29s that then were now routinely bombing Japan, the campaign to seize Okinawa took about three months at an enormous cost in American casualties, because the Japanese just would not give up. They would fight to the end. I don't remember how many casualties, how many people there were, but maybe about five or eight thousand Japanese civilians that there living and working and maintaining the bases, en masse went to some cliffs and jumped down into the ocean, men, women, and children, rather than surrender to the Americans, and so that made our military stop to figure what it would be like if we landed on the mainland of Japan.

So this must have been in the mind of President Harry Truman, Roosevelt having died months before, that it was in the interest of both countries to stop the war by the use of the atomic bomb, as bad as it was in terms of starting the atomic age. Later on it turned out the [Japanese and the] Russians were hard at work trying to develop an atomic bomb, so the atomic bomb would have been developed by the Soviet Union, with some of the secrets they stole from us, which they did it turns out. But that was the end of the military experience, and so several million Americans were just told, "There's your last check. Off you go." "How am I going to get home to Tennessee?" "I don't know. You've got your last check, you get to Tennessee."

And not long after then the G.I. Bill of Rights was conceived and passed. But so many Americans were lost during that war, and it was such an enormous experience, that something like that was passed and made, of course, a phenomenal change in American society, which is a feeling that is not felt now, because the war in Iraq was fought by volunteers, and we did

not raise taxes to fund that war. Bear in mind--were you aware of that? [George W.] Bush did not raise taxes. He reduced taxes and then just simply borrowed the money to conduct the war. The Vietnam War was fought and it is still being fought on the credit card. The Democrats haven't had the guts, the political guts, to say, "Okay, let's now start raising taxes to fund the war in Iraq," or in Afghanistan.

So the World War II experience was a totally different thing, and if you were even at the end of it--I remember it, because when we were in junior high school I remember the broadcast of FDR's speech to Congress after December seventh [Pearl Harbor], and in schools across the country as low as junior high, all the big junior high schools, we were asked, and almost all did, start to make things that would be useful for the war, like drawing in very fine detail and then cutting black pieces of paper that looked precisely like, oh, half a dozen Japanese planes, and then these were then sent out to the public and to military bases as well, to train plane spotters so that they could look at something and just flash, it's this or it's that, because when we were in the Navy we had surveillance training, and you'd lose that in time, but we could spot and identify the type of plane that we were likely to encounter in just a split second, I mean, in the time it takes to snap your fingers, and that was it. "All right, what is it?" "Uh, uh, uh--." "You God damn stupid son of a bitch. What the fuck are you going to do when you're out there?" "Let me see it again." [snaps fingers] "Oh, it's a Mitsubishi." "All right now, damn it. Don't forget it." That was kind of the intensity of the training, and we also made models of wood like the airplanes, and they're about this big, very precise, junior high school, just like that plane, and they're always black, and it was our contribution, so it was an enormous national experience.

Espino

Well, just one last question before we stop. You'd talked about how you feel that it was somewhat justified, the bombing of

Hiroshima, but what about all the civilians that were hurt? Do you remember at that time feeling like--or did you even know that it wasn't just military bases that were targeted, but they were civilian populations?

Nava

The bombs were dropped on a city. You were aware of the civilian loss, but you were not--you were sorry but not sorry. I remember thinking, "They started the war." And we were already inured or made insensitive by TV reporting, "Movie Tone News" I remember is one of the big ones, of our bombing of German cities, and towards the end of the war, the European war, there were numerous occasions, I would not say innumerable, but hundreds of cases where German cities were bombed at night by approximately one thousand Allied bombers at night. One thousand airplanes indiscriminately bombing German cities like a checkerboard, letters this way, numbers this way, so tonight we have L-14, and just leveling cities. So Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not that different.

I remember Ernesto [Vera] and I on one of the trips that we made, the Soviet Union was just about crumbling in '90, '91. We went behind the Iron Curtain into Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Poland, and saw, and I took videos of just the wretched living conditions of people, whereas in West Germany it was like here, already like here. In fact, most of the rubble had been cleared away. And we went to the City of Dresden in East Germany. Dresden became famous because the Allies were bombing German cities with incendiary bombs, not so much demolition bombs, and it so happened that in the bombing of Dresden sharp winds blew up for natural reasons, like you can sometimes get very windy, and so most of the city was burned to the ground except where stone walls endured. But the fire was so intense that stones melted or popped, and when we visited Dresden, 90 percent of it had been restored into modern conditions, though frugal, except the heart of the city, which had been left demolished. There was no fence

around it. That section of the city was the way it was left, and there were always people walking in there, mostly foreigners that came to see how demolished all of Dresden had been, and it was just so heart-wrenching to try to imagine the entire city like this.

And one of the--I think it ranked as a cathedral--the biggest churches in Dresden was in great part a survivor, and it had a tower that went up about two-thirds of the way and then some adjacent structures, and it had a famous name, because it was a female saint and there aren't that many. How come? And since then I read somewhere that that demolished part of Dresden has been wiped out and rebuilt, and that that cathedral has been rebuilt, because they had pictures and paintings of it, so they knew what it looked like, okay, as a gesture on the part of modern Germans to say, "The war's over. Why be reminded about the horror of it?" But that was Dresden, the greatest amount of demolition in a German city. So hundreds of thousands of people were burnt alive, so Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not that different. Probably fewer people died there than in Germany, because I don't think it reached 250,000 in those two cities in Japan. There must have been close to ten times that many in Germany. So, yes, it was terrible, no doubt about it, but the costs on both sides would have been far, far, far worse if we had had to subjugate the islands of Japan, because that's what it had to be, a subjugation.

So World War II was quite an experience, and I guess people that remember any of it, even towards the end like me and Rudy [Acuña], because Rudy also went into towards the end--he was there, I think, during the occupation, and married a German girl and of all of that, and it didn't work out once they got back here, but many, many, many thousands of Americans married Europeans. Yes. The world will never see a conflict like that again, because it's not in the nature of existing regimes. We'll never go to war against Russia. We have advisers over

there intimately involved in helping them dismantle their nuclear bombs and missiles, and they have their chosen experts here working with ours dismantling ours.

So think of a complexity largely misunderstood or not understood of Ronald Reagan. I don't have a high opinion of Ronald Reagan, but in Iceland talking to Gorbachev it's recorded that in their talk about nuclear bombs and missiles, to the astonishment of the American military advisers around the two guys, each with their own, Reagan said, "I agree with you. Why don't both of us just simply destroy all of our atom bombs and missiles? You don't have to worry about us and we don't have to worry about you, and you can save a lot of money and we can save a lot of money." And Gorbachev was amazed, and, "Well, why don't we talk about this again tomorrow?" "Okay." We don't know what the Russians did when they got back to their group, their hotels. When our group came back into our hotels, our military advisers jumped on the president politely and said, "Mr. President, you can't have meant," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And maybe the Russians went through the same experience. But Reagan said, "Well, God damn it, if we can monitor them and they can monitor us, we don't have to worry about all that shit anymore." "Ah, but Mr. President, Mr. President--."

And so they got together the next day, and both of them had been forced to tune down, but that was the beginning, that was the first SALT [Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty] treaty to-
-what does SALT stand for? Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty. That was SALT-1, provoked by Ronnie, the movie star.

Espino

Well, I think I'm going to turn off the recorder now and stop it here. [Nava laughs]

1.3. Session 2 (July 28, 2009)

Espino

This is Virginia Espino and today is July 28, 2009. I'm interviewing Dr. Julian Nava at his home in Valley Center, California. Okay, Dr. Nava, I wanted to just continue on with your first academic teaching job, which was at CSUN [California State University Northridge]. Is that correct?

Espino

Well, that was the first teaching job in the States. I taught a year in Valladolid, Spain, our first year of married life. It was Fulbright job and the interesting thing about that job was that it was the idea of the minister of culture in Spain, a giant in Spanish politics. His name was Fraga Iribarne. Fraga Iribarne Gallego, like Fidel Castro, thought of starting to bring American professors to Spain to start a transition from the closed-minded narrow Catholic-oriented educational system in Spain under Francisco Franco. So about seven, maybe only five, but I think five to seven American professors were hired to teach a course at a different university, and I got the job pretty much as a fluke. I was going to go to Nepal before Pat [Lucas Nava] and I became engaged, and then we married and the guy that was going to go to Valladolid died, and so they were stuck, because they had a position to fill.

So they knew I was Spanish-speaking, so they asked me whether I would go and I said, "Yes, definitely." So Pat and I went to Valladolid, a traditional, medieval-oriented university where, for example, I was escorted each class day into the classroom by a guard, a medieval-style guard, an old man with a big, long staff, and he opened the door to the classroom after the students were already in, about 150 students. He banged on the floor, bam, bam, to announce that the professor was coming in, and then I came in. [laughs] I remember he said, "Professors don't walk in rapidly. They proceed ceremonially." So I went up to the front of the classroom and the students were all standing. When they heard the bang, bang they stood up. So I put my stuff down on the lectern and then said, "Buenos dias," and 150 or so

shouted back, "Buenos dias professor," almost in unison. And then I said, "Por favor, sientense," and they all sat down. I think the guy's name was Edil, I don't know how to spell it, probably E-d-i-l, and he told me, "When you have five minutes left to talk, I will discreetly open the door so that you can see me," he said, "and you must finish on time, because students have the right to start leaving if they want to if you go over your time." "Okay," I said, and so that's the way it was for the semester.

The course was on American history and social institutions, not political, but, of course, politics came into it. Students never asked questions. They don't ask questions in that traditional structure. But after about a month a handful of students came up and caught me in the hall, because when the lecture was over I folded up all my stuff carefully and then I walked out the door, and then they could leave, so it was very, very ceremonial. So they asked me if I would join them across the street in the bar and have some tapas, which meant some tapas and some beer. In that part of Spain all the wine is red, strong red wine, so after class we would go and have some tapas and a glass or two of wine. So after the formalities of instruction, everything was very friendly and informal, but very structured in the university.

So we taught there a year, and we had bought a brand-new little Volkswagen in Brussels, and then we toured Europe all the way to Greece, through Yugoslavia, which was then still Yugoslavia, and Marshall Tito, of course, was in power; Austria and Switzerland and then all the way up to Brussels, I think it was, where we caught a big ocean liner and then sailed home. Drove the car off the boat in New York and scared to death of New York traffic. God, those people were crazy. People complain about California, it's nothing compared to Manhattan. And so we just drove across the country. Six months after we were back, or maybe eight or so, I got this offer to set up an overseas study center in a country of my choosing south of

Mexico, and I chose Colombia. Colombia was a good choice. I also thought of Santiago de Chile.

Anyway, we went down there to Bogotá, and by now our twin daughters [Carmen and Katie Nava] were six months old, and looking back it was a dumb thing to do. I would never do that again, and I've always admired Pat that she put up with the chore. Our two beautiful daughters were eighteen months. They learned how to walk while they were there. So we set up this educational study center in Bogotá, and it is still functioning, to my knowledge, that twelve universities or twelve colleges all chipped in. Then we came home and resumed teaching at CSUN.

Espino

What year would that be?

Nava

Let's see. It was in 1964.

Espino

1964. Can you talk to me a little bit about some of the experiences you had first in Spain as a professor there and maybe what you might have brought back to--what might have enriched your teaching or brought a different perspective to your teaching?

Nava

No, because the teaching was very structured. It was straight lectures and no class discussion. It was medieval in its structure. I did learn from the after-class sessions with the students that as narrow and close-minded as the media was in Spain, students liked the United States and were very, very curious about the United States and our habits and our customs and the way that we lived. Spain was wretchedly poor while we were there, but the United States had entered into a treaty with Spain to allow us to house a nuclear-submarine

base in a city in southern Spain called Rota, and I think that submarine base is probably still there. It was a base, and this was apropos or in light of the cold war, and we also were given permission to build a very large Air Force base near Zaragoza [Zaragoza Air Force Base] in north-central Spain.

So this change in climate, I think, is what helped make possible the professorships, and Spain was beginning to open up and as I understand it, in great part due to Fraga Iribarne, the leader of the major political party, who just simply figured times are changing and Spain must change also, so he is the architect of the Spanish tourist industry. Spain did not attract tourists before as such, and he just looked at everything and figured, we can't compete with France and Germany and England industrially. Our biggest industry is going to have to be tourism, and so he started the construction of tourist hotels and the construction of what are called paradores. A parador is a refurbished, restored castle, of which Spain has hundreds, and in select locations castles were simply restored true to their form for flavor, but had electricity and plumbing and comfortable beds and superb service and excellent food, and now there must be maybe seventy-five paradores in Spain, and they're so popular that you have to make reservations for them almost a year ahead of time if you're going during the tourist season. I hope we can stay in one or two paradores that are off the beaten path, because we'll be going at the end of the tourist season.

Anyway, Fraga Iribarne is the architect of the opening of Spain and the tourist industry, which is Spain's biggest source of income still. So we were able to travel all over Spain, because Spain was so Catholic then, still is, there are always religious holidays. I mean, there were at least two if not three religious holidays a month, and so we would just jump into our little Volkswagen bug and drive all over the place and savor excellent local bread, and, of course, the bread was local. They didn't have big merchandising firms like they did later and

developed later on, and local wines and local cheeses and local sausages, and so we really got to know Spain very well during that year, and it was an experience we'll always remember.

So Pat got pregnant while we were there, and the poor gal was very sick while we were on, I think it was the Queen Mary coming across the Atlantic. One episode was she got up in the middle of the night, she said, "I just have to walk." "Okay, fine." So she got up and was walking down the long hall, and she must have taken a turn to the left or to the right, but she got disoriented, and then when she was coming back she couldn't find our room. So she found it, she thought, and walked into this cabin and got over close to the bed to crawl into bed, and we were sleeping together, and then she noticed it was another man. She'd walked into the wrong stateroom, and she just slipped out of the room and closed the door quietly, horror-stricken. And luckily a steward came walking by, and she asked him, "Where's the room for the Navas?" [laughs]

But it was an interesting trip on that big boat. It was five days at that time, coming across the Atlantic.

Espino

That's a long time. But this is interesting, because it seems like you are a person of Mexican descent living in the United States, very close to Mexico, but your first experience out of the country is really in Spain, as somebody who lives in a different country and experiences a different culture.

Nava

Well, I'd been in Mexico to Zacatecas I think maybe twice before, but I hadn't lived in Mexico. But I did realize in Spain how Spanish we are, physical appearance and speech, although they have a different vocabulary for many words, ascensor instead of elevador and so forth, so I acquired a great respect and admiration for Spanish culture and over time

have come to realize that Mexican Americans should get closer to Spain and not just Mexico, because Spain has had its civil war, of course, but it's opened up and it's a European country, and they don't have the hang-ups that Mexico has, and it makes Mexican Americans tri-cultural to get close to Spain as well as Mexico, while being American. So that was one thing that I picked up there, that we're really tri-cultural and that that makes us potentially more--it makes us richer and more resourceful.

Espino

This was before the Chicano Movement.

Nava

Yes, just before, just before.

Espino

Right. Do you remember being aware of identity issues at that time when you were there?

Nava

Oh, yes. Oh, sure. Oh, yes, not then, not in Spain, but identity issues here, sure, and the identity issues started to flare up socio-politically about the time we came back from Colombia, and much of it in southern California started at the local universities like CSUN and like Cal State L.A., but mostly CSUN and chiefly because of the presence there of someone like Rudy [Acuña] and myself and Edward Moreno and some other fellows there, because not long after we got back from Colombia, as these tensions started to build up along with black issues--the Chicano Movement fed on black awareness. They rose at the same time, but in light of the same mentality or feeling and feeling of assertiveness, not so much rebellion but assertiveness among youth, which that's about the way it happens universally. Around the world those issues peculiar to a given country tend to arise in the universities.

So that's what led to riots or disturbances in L.A. and demonstrations at CSUN, which ultimately led to the rise of the Chicano Studies Department, which is another episode in itself. But that awareness, much of it prompted by the Vietnam War - the Vietnam War and opposition to it was the sparkplug, because many of these young people were subject to the draft, and there were very high casualties in Vietnam, and in Vietnam a very large number of the troops were Hispanic. Hispanics were one of the most significant major groups in Vietnam, as were blacks. But police action against demonstrations regarding the war in Vietnam then just aroused more hostility, feeding on prejudice that existed, so that's what ultimately led to demonstrations at CSUN among blacks and Hispanics working together that led to the seizing of the administration building. No harm intended, no harm done, but seizing of the administration building.

At that time we had an interim president, Delmar T. Oviatt, after whom the library is named, a well-meaning man but very conservative in these kinds of things, very well-meaning however, and because of an error in judgment so to speak and concern for physical damage to the library, for example, and the administration building, he called in police, and then probably some young student, rather than a junior or a senior, threw something at a police officer, and then the riot started, and that pretty much kind of like closed down the campus for several days, because then Oviatt called in more police, and he kind of like quarantined the campus.

And just about then the trustees appointed our new president. What the hell was his name? Cleary, James Cleary, from Wisconsin or Minnesota. I always forget those two states. But he came right in the middle of all of this, and as it turned out it was fortunate, because he didn't know a taco from a tamale. He didn't know about black-white issues, but there aren't many blacks in the state he came from, so this was new to him, and he was probably very, very concerned, and this led to

his calling a faculty meeting of people he relied on, all of them new to him, to try to advise him as to what to do in this situation. And one of the people that he invited was Dolores Litzinger Huerta, but she was Mexican American, Dolores Litzinger Huerta, and she was very pronounced in her Mexican American feelings, Dolores was.

There might have been one or two blacks on the campus faculty, might have been, probably not at that point. There soon were to be, but that is the origin of the Chicano Movement. It wasn't called Chicano then, the Mexican American Movement at CSUN. And at the same time in Colorado, Corky Gonzales was coining the term Chicano, (I am Joaquin) and that whole part of that broad movement in the beginning through telephone and personal contacts, beginning of the use of the word Chicano instead of Mexicano or Mexican American, because it had American in it. So gradually the use of the word spread. But I don't remember whether we talked about that episode, but at the risk of repetition.

Espino

What I wanted to find out, because you mentioned a little bit about how the students interpreted the Vietnam War and discrimination, how did you yourself look at those same issues, as someone who was a bit older, already received his degree, had traveled to these other countries, how did you understand the civil rights issues and the Vietnam War?

Nava

Well, I was already elected to the school board in L.A. and so I felt that I had to be more circumspect and not be out there parading with students, so that was one conditioning factor. But I knew that the war was a terrible mistake and that Ho Chi Minh, the leader in the north, had asked the United States for an alliance in his effort to unite Vietnam, and this effort would have strengthened Vietnam against encroachments by China. The Chinese have always coveted that part of the world, and

Ho Chi Minh, fearful of China, offered the United States to become allies, and the United States turned him down because he was a communist and feared he would unite Vietnam and make it a communist society. So the incident that took place in the Bay of Tonkin, which has proven to have been a false incident, probably provoked by the United States and exaggerated to justify sending in advisers at first to South Vietnam, I was aware of those things and said, what a stupid thing. It's not our concern, and the Chinese will never be able to go into Vietnam, because the Vietnamese have fought them off and on for centuries. They're natural enemies.

But the war began and I kept hoping it wouldn't get bigger, but it kept getting bigger, from advisers to a few military advisers, and then one thing led to another, but the draft was instituted. Students opposed the war. They didn't know all of the history or the dynamics of the countries involved, but knew that they were going to be drafted. So faculty was mostly opposed to the war, too, although you had mixed feelings of patriotism, because our only sources of information on television were pro-administration, and Kennedy was so popular you kind of hated to go against Kennedy. But he was a novice in these things, and he was suckered in by the military and suckered in by those members in our government that were what I would call professional anti-communists. And there was no friendly communist country in the world that we could look at except Yugoslavia, but some scholars said, "Look. We get along fine with Tito. He may be a communist, but he's our communist, because he resists Russian designs in the Balkans." So we backed Tito to the point of letting the Russians know that if he attacked Yugoslavia, he was really threatening the West, and so Stalin did not attack Marshall Tito, and Yugoslavia maintained its separation as a communist state and society allied to the West.

So the Vietnam War really was very divisive, because there were good arguments on both sides and among Democrats

admiration for Kennedy and trusting that he would do the right thing. But in through there I don't remember the chronology, but our disastrous invasion of Cuba took place, and again that was the cold war, but at that time we were given to understand that we were threatened by Russian missiles. But faculty that were more likely to follow news and to read more broadly and think about it, like I for one at the time, said, "Russia is never going to launch missiles against the United States from Cuba, because they would be committing suicide. We would then launch missiles against all of Russia." So I was also aware that the United States had missiles, nuclear-armed missiles in Turkey aimed at major Russian cities and industrial centers, and the Russians must have found out about it, and Nikita Khrushchev, who was premier at the time, a belligerent guy by nature, sort of like a Texan, said, "Well, then, all right. By god, we're going to have missiles in Cuba. So there." So that's the origin of the missile adventure of Nikita Khrushchev.

And you may recall that as one of the major elements in the settlement that brought about the withdrawal of the missiles in Cuba, we promised secretly and did not inform the public I don't think ever, but the word leaked out in time that we then had agreed to withdraw our missiles from Turkey, and we never informed the Russians that our missiles in Turkey were very unreliable. I mean, if one launched towards Moscow it might hit Leningrad. The guidance system was very imperfect, but they were nuclear-armed missiles, and that's all that Russia cared about. We don't know how reliable the Russian missiles in Cuba were for that matter. But as it turned out, and I learned that in Cuba, to the great resentment of Cubans, Cubans were not allowed on the missile bases in Cuba, only Russians. About 35,000 Russian troops were brought into Cuba to set up and manage, to man the missile bases. Cubans were not trusted, and only Russians had access to the missiles. They were simply based in Cuba.

But all those kind of things were going on, but we didn't know a lot about the adventure in Cuba at that time, other than the fact that it seemed like the United States had been on the brink of a nuclear war. Pat and I were in Spain actually during the missile crisis. We were in Spain and really thought, we're lucky. I don't think Spain is going to be involved in a transcontinental exchange of missiles. But all those things were on the minds of students, and the Chicano and the Black Movement arose in that climate of anxiety, and so James Cleary was advised by his faculty advisory group to give in to demands of the black students, who by now had formed the Black Student Union, and Mexican Americans had formed a group, too. I don't remember whether they called themselves Chicanos already, although some of them probably did, asking for a Mexican American Studies Department and a Black Studies Department, and I think both groups sort of agreed that although the few American Indians in the protest movement wanted one also, that there weren't enough students in that group yet to merit it, but yes, later on this would also be a good idea.

So Dolores Litzinger was a member of that about six-to-eight-member faculty group, and so they came with a recommendation to the president, which is probably on file, it's probably on file--those kinds of things tend to be recorded or preserved--recommending that a Black Studies Department and a by now Chicano Studies Department be formed on campus, and Cleary was anxious to do almost anything to calm the temperature, just cool it, and this was a price that he was willing to pay. The Black Studies, okay, are fine. Chicanos, what's that? He just didn't understand, but he gradually came to understand, well, these are Mexican Americans and they're starting to call themselves Chicanos. And the committee recommended to the president that faculty be hired, and at that time the campus was not broke. The campuses were well funded at that time, so he could just simply create three or four faculty members for each of the departments.

And he accepted the recommendation that the founding chair be a full professor, because in campus power distribution only a full professor was a peer in committees that would decide who gets how many classes and distribution of the pie. So he said, "Well, fine, that makes sense. Okay. So try to identify a Black Studies Department candidate for full professorship, and I will accept your recommendation, and the same for Chicanos."

During those months I had recommended to our history department that Rudy Acuña be appointed as an assistant professor in the Department of History. Rudy at that time was teaching at Pierce, so I see the timing. These things started to happen while he was at Pierce, and then he joined our campus. There were three of us on the nominating committee for the Department of History. We had a position open, and I nominated Rudy and got his vitae and all those kinds of things, and we were down to two of the most likely candidates. Let's see, I was on the committee and then Helmut Hoisler, and I can't remember the name of the third guy, who was from the Midwest, a fair-minded, well-educated, smart guy, but he was new to the campus.

So we talked about the two candidates. The other candidate was Charles McCune, who ultimately was appointed and then later on became chairman of the Department of History for many, many years. He kind of liked the job, and he knew Mexican Americans having been raised in Texas, and Rudy, and I made the case for Rudy and that we were getting ready to take the vote. And Helmut Hoisler, who was chair, turned to me and he said, "Ah, Julian." He said, "Both candidates are well qualified." He was very Germanic, Helmut. "But we already have one of your people." And I didn't know what to say, like he'd struck me in the face, and so we voted and Charles McCune got two votes to one, and we recommended him to the whole department and then he was hired. And

Rudy, I called him or saw him or whatever it was and told him what happened.

Well, within months, within months the riots took place at the campus. The president arrived, and Litzinger, I'll just call it the Litzinger committee, although she wasn't chair, did its thing and recommended Rudy Acuña as founding chair of Chicano Studies. And James Cleary knew nothing about the episode in the Department of History, nothing about it. Dolores knew about it. I called her and told her about the disaster, and so Rudy was appointed. It was the middle of the semester, and so he got a small office in one of the buildings there, and there wasn't a position available for the rest of that semester to even assign him a secretary. So Rudy came over to my office, and I didn't have a secretary, but I had access to two secretaries, department secretaries, so if I wanted a letter well written and everything, I would just take my draft over and the girls would do it.

Anyway, the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, which included history, geography, and anthropology and what else, sociology, said, "Well, fine. Okay," with mixed feelings, like, what the hell is all this about? Dumb Cleary, he doesn't know what he's doing. Said, "Well, the procedure is you have to submit the curriculum and the courses, and the courses have to be accompanied by a course outline with readings, sample questions," and it's a short term paper for each course. So Rudy started on his own to--"What kind of courses should we have?" And so he was often, because I was teaching, okay, over in my office on the sixth floor, working, devising the program for Chicano Studies.

And we would talk, and we would argue and discuss, but just the two of us, and he devised the Chicano Studies Department course proposals and submitted them to the curriculum committee, and the curriculum committee looked at these with a magnifying glass, but approved every single course offering, which is kind of out of the question, because quite often they

will come back and say, "Well, this is worthy of note, but we're concerned about this, that, or the other. Expand your bibliography," or whatever. They accepted all courses, and I think there were about eight courses, because Rudy is Jesuit-trained. [laughs] I kid him about it. "Ah, you God damn Jesuits." "I'm not a Jesuit." "You went to a Jesuit school, damn it. Anyone that goes to a Jesuit school is always a Jesuit." "Oh, let me have the beer."

And so he got all this work done, which was really phenomenal, and by the end of the semester we had a Chicano Studies Department with a full curriculum. Then summer took place and then by the fall he got a secretary and a regular little office somewhere, and that was the beginning of the program. Dolores and I were, of course, delighted, and the Black Studies guy that was brought in, for example, I think half of his courses were not accepted by the curriculum committee. It took them a long time to get started. And they had other problems that were internal to blacks, having to do with how to react socially and politically. In other words, do they join the system or do they reject the system? Because riots had already taken place, and so they were divided by those kinds of sentiments, which the Mexican Americans were not.

And then finally we started recruiting, recruiting Mexican American students, and sympathetic members of the faculty that were not Chicanos went out to high schools on a volunteer basis, talking to counselors, trying to identify young people and get them to enroll at CSUN. "Don't worry, we'll take care of everything. If they're deficient in this, that, or the other, they'll get extra counseling." We recruited about 150 or so students from valley schools, and all of them in time because of their motivation and the concern of--I mean, three or four young faculty members in the founding members of the Department of Chicano Studies just helped the students and then brought them up to speed, which you can do with almost

anyone if they've got the smarts to begin with and are motivated. With help you can bring them up, and so that's how it started, and Rudy deserves the credit for that institution, which as you know has become probably--in time became the largest Chicano Studies Department in the U.S. and probably still is.

In many campuses the departments were absorbed into other subject areas, or they withered away, because they were started up in an effort of, "Give them something. Give them something so they won't burn down the library." So that was part of the movement, and all during that time I was on the school board and facing the problems of education and bilingual studies and bilingualism and school board politics, trying to meet the needs of minority students better.

Espino

Before we move on, because this was all happening at the same time, the '68 walkouts, the formation of CSUN, your role on the board of education, this was all happening it seems like in the same two years, so before we go on to the walkouts and your role on the board of education, I wanted to ask you about--because I just finished interviewing Dr. Acuña, and it seems like you were very good friends, but at the same time you have two different ways of approaching the same situation or the same issue, and I'd like to know something about what you agreed on during the formation of Chicano Studies, and some of the issues that you disagreed on, some things that you found maybe he didn't do the way you would have liked him to do it, and things that you felt like this was a great move or a great decision on his part.

Nava

There were no significant disagreements ever. The disagreements or different points of view are natural to a complicated situation within which you're trying to come up with how to proceed. It was a question every now and then of

tone. In other words, I did not think, nor was it really the case, that resentment or hostility commonly found among blacks was worthy of Mexican Americans. I did not feel that we had had the same kind of experience that blacks had, and that we could get ahead once there were adequate opportunities and ganas and desire on our part, and now we were beginning to have those things come together. But Rudy said, "You have to get emotions aroused in order to motivate people to do things, and you have to be against something in order to have something that you can be for." And I can understand that, I just wasn't brought up that way, nor was Rudy for that matter. But he just realized, you have to energize students. You have to motivate students. You have to build your base, and you have to learn about and resent and hate oppression and racism, of which there was plenty around, in order that students will feel an intense feeling of loyalty as well as pride.

So it was really a matter of tone. It was a matter of tone, but I could not fault the argument that to build up allegiance and an intense desire to get something done, you have to be against something and not simply for something. The point came, for example--oh, that's right--where Chicano students once there were 150 or so on campus, some bitterly criticized girls who dated Anglos, or guys who dated non-Mexican Americans. "They're not ours. Aren't Mexican girls good enough for you?" And vice versa. And so separatism, which is part of the technique of building intense feelings of group identity, group identity, led to that kind of thing. And my feeling was, this is not worthy of us. It's not necessary. I can understand it and okay, but it's not the best thing to do. And gradually that feeling of exclusivity weakened or faded, because if you like a girl, you're going to go out with her. If she likes the boy, she's going to go out with him even if he's American, okay? He's a nice guy but he's American. But this kind of divisiveness, but also I was opposed to it because it led to rejection and isolation by the majority of the group.

In other words, if you isolate yourself, you're going to cause the same reaction on the part of the others, and the others are the majority, because at that time there might have been 5,000 students on the campus, and 150 or 200 Mexican American students, a rather small minority, and many of them were there on academic waivers, and other students knew that. You can tell who's really with it and who's barely making it. So it was a process through which both majority and minority groups had to go through, and they did, and in time, due to better counseling and dedication in the high schools, stronger minority students started entering CSUN, and then in time they just kind of fused. But that took three, four, seven years, and I kept arguing way back, "The struggle really begins in junior high school. You have to start getting the kids ready for college in junior high school. It's almost too late in high school."

But Rudy and I were very active in educational things, politics in the school board, and so was Ed [Eddie] Moreno and some other folks that I didn't see as constantly as Ed or Rudy. But it was an educational revolution or evolution that took place within a relatively short period of time. Within six to eight years the system in L.A. moved around not 180 degrees, but it moved around significantly, and Chicano Studies Departments at Cal State Long Beach and L.A. also helped. In other words, it was a statewide phenomenon, and separatism was very pronounced for a long time, and it's understandable. So in time I finally said, getting criticized by some students, "Professor, how come you call yourself Mexican American? What's wrong with Chicano?" And I would say, in gratitude that they felt free enough to ask me and to challenge me, I said, "Good. You're getting with it." I'd say, "Well, first of all, no one is sure about the etymology of Chicano. There are two or three different origins of the word, none of which are positive by the way, in Mexico. But be that as it may," I said, "I like Mexican American because it's anthropologically, sociologically, historically accurate. I'm claiming that I'm

American. I'm not a tall Mexican American, I'm not a yellow Mexican or a brown Mexican, I'm a Mexican American." "It takes too long to say." "Well, I agree." "Chicano is a lot better." "All right, you guys. Call me Chicano and I will use the word Chicano," and so I started to thereafter, just to erase that potential friction among the chauvinist students at the campus that needed reinforcement and that needed support and not necessarily accuracy. [laughs]

So it was part of the process, huh? It was part of the process, and it will never happen again. It won't be necessary. And it is not fully understood, but this dating thing, okay, was a factor, and the name, self-identification was a factor, and the realization that, like I had come to realize in the Navy, I can do it. We can do it as well as anybody else, and another important element in this mix was that whites cared about blacks because they were afraid of them, but they were not afraid of Chicanos, and so all the goodies in jobs and allocations and contracts and concern and coverage on television and in the newspapers about minority problems, minorities meant black, especially in terms of appointments. It was all black-white, and so Mexican Americans, Chicanos had this struggle and had to contain themselves and hold themselves back from resentment and hatred of blacks, who by the same token often put down Mexican Americans, because they saw Mexican Americans as competitors for the cookies, for the goodies, of which there were not enough.

And so that explains a lot of particular things that came up where Mexican Americans supported blacks because it was the right thing to do, but blacks did not return the favor, and Mexican Americans just simply had to stop and realize, well, they're still suffering from slavery, although there were many people who, even myself, said, "We don't have slavery anymore. This is a hundred years ago, and so they should not make demands because of slavery. They should make demands because of racism and poverty and injustice, but

they don't deserve reparations any more than Mexicans deserve reparations because Yankees stole the Southwest. How come we don't say that?" Well, some were. Corkey [Rodolfo Gonzales] and some Chicanos were saying things like that, which led to intense concern on the part of the FBI, which helped explain why my office phones and house phone were tapped, because they figured, "Nava is a leader among Mexican Americans in southern California," because the school board job was L.A. County.

So I knew the phone was tapped, because you heard funny sounds every now and then when you picked it up, and so I often said things into the phone deliberately to mislead or disorient, but Eddie and Rudy and I were perfectly aware that our phones were tapped. We didn't have cell phones at that time, so I don't know whether you can tap into a cell phone. So whenever we had other important things to talk about, we would meet or call from a--I think phones at that time were dime. You could call on a public phone. But the FBI was very concerned about a movement among Chicanos to recapture the Southwest, not return it to Mexico, but to seize control of it, and Reyes Tijerina in New Mexico at that time was filing suit against the federal government to regain title to enormous tracts of land in New Mexico.

So there was really that kind of concern, fed in great part by Quebec and the effort on the part of Quebequa, French-speaking Canadians, to gain independence for the Province of Quebec, fed by statements made by Charles de Gaulle at the time that were encouraging to them. That guy, quite a character, quite a personality, but he made a number of talks encouraging the French Quebec to assert themselves and not to break away from Canada, but to gain independence within Canada. So the Southwest was a matter of concern to many people in the U.S.

Espino

How real do you think that threat was?

Nava

On the part of Mexican Americans?

Espino

Yes.

Nava

Totally unreal, totally unreal. And if it was, I would have found out. I would have known. No one asked me, "Hey, Julian, what about this, what about that?"

Espino

There were people though who were armed. How significant do you think that threat was to build a movement?

Nava

I don't think it was significant. The existence of any small group of people here or there cannot be denied, but I was unaware of it. I was unaware of it and never imagined that it would ever gain prominence, because at that time we were active as Mexican Americans, were voting, were starting to vote and starting to gain a voice in the Democratic Party system. And separation? Come on, what are you talking about? What are you drinking? So that was never a factor.

Espino

You mentioned that you found African Americans more torn by the idea of working within the system versus working outside of the system and that you didn't see that same situation with Chicanos or Mexican Americans--

Nava

Not to the same extent. I mean, there was Black Power, to begin with, black capitalism, and there was brown power, yes, but it didn't have the same connotation. It didn't have the

hatred and the resentment that was true among many in, for example, the Black Muslim Movement. There wasn't that kind of intensity. But there was an intense reaction on the part of the establishment or elements of the law enforcement to counter both groups and to suppress and to contain and to discourage by means of handicaps and problems the development of black financial institutions or Mexican American financial institutions.

Reagan was governor for two terms. That's a long time. And I was among victims of a group that established a savings and loan in the San Joaquin Valley. We founded the group, and I was a member of the advisory council, so I was not one of the ringleaders in the group, but I was on the board of trustees and a member of the advisory board. So this savings and loan was started in Porterville and immediately started to get a lot of deposits, and then you make loans and then get interest on them and so forth, among Mexican Americans. It was an example of brown capitalism, and we envisioned that in time this could be substantial. In other words, why bank with Bank of America when you can bank with the Mexican American Savings & Loan? And at that time in what turned out to be an enormous fiasco, Congress under pressure from savings-and-loan interest groups, permitted savings and loans to act like banks and to make investments. Before that, savings and loans could not make investments. They could make loans, but not make investments.

And so this led to the largest-to-date economic fiasco, second only to this last one that we're in now, that the government had to put in billions and billions and billions of dollars to buy up obligations of the savings and loans that imprudently invested money and then were victimized by an economic downturn which was not of their making. But this savings and loan started to prosper, and a very dear friend invested, I think, about \$200,000 in it. He was Germanic, and he lost it all, because savings and loans were now empowered to lend

money to other banks. Now, banks make a lot of money lending money to other banks. It's a cash-flow situation, and they'll lend money overnight, so they may lend money overnight, let's say \$500,000, and then they'll get the money back a day or two later, all by wire, and then pick up \$10,000 or \$15,000 for the transaction.

So our savings and loan treasury guy was doing very, very well with that, in addition to the other activities of the savings and loan, and this came to the attention of bank regulators in Sacramento, so they simply sent out a directive, whatever the office was, saying, "Savings and Loans in California are no longer allowed to do this, that is, to lend money to other institutions." I think they're called interbank deposits, something like that. So we were told that at a board meeting, and so, "Oh, what a shame, the dirty guys. They just have resentment that we're doing well." Because not all minority financial institutions were doing very well. Pan American Bank, a bank in East L.A., founded by a Republican, I forget her name, prominent Republican, was doing very well. It was a regular bank. It still operates. And we were a savings and loan.

Our treasury guy made the innocent mistake of making one more interbank loan, and it was pure chance, but it was caught in Sacramento, and so just, bang, like that, an order was issued, "You will stop operations." "What do you mean?" "Stop operations." And then a group from Sacramento was sent over in two or three weeks to start looking through our books. Nothing out of the ordinary was found, but what killed the savings and loan was stopping operations, and the group went bankrupt, and lawsuits were threatened against all of the board of directors, including the advisory board. So I was on the Board of Education, and so being a defendant against the State of California is destined to ruin you financially, and so at one lunch I was having lunch in L.A.--there were always lunches, you know. Board members at that time were kind of

big shots. We were invited to lunches all over the place. I was talking to an attorney, Wayne [Zobrisk], and he said, "Hi, Julian. What's up?" And I said, "Oh, the sky's falling." "Oh, really? What is it?" And so I told him about the savings and loan. He said, "Oh, wow. Gee, that could be nasty."

And it turns out that this law firm was comprised, a very strong law firm in L.A., mostly of Mormons. Mormons are another part of the United States, okay? And they think in time they're going to simply absorb the United States, and I'm not mincing words. That's how they feel. They're quiet about it, so I say, be careful about electing Romney president. Anyway, they had this quiet, reserved but intense loyalty, and he said, "Oh, my god." He said, "Why don't you come by the office and tell us in more detail?" because someone else had come over to talk to us. Mormons don't drink alcohol, so we were not drinking alcohol at lunch. So I went over to the office in downtown L.A. and spelled out the whole thing, and so Wayne said, "You're going to need help, Julian. Would you let us help you?" "Gee, sure, Wayne, any help you can give us. You know what the salaries of professors are, and school board members get \$100 per meeting." And so he in turn before long selected a team of three young attorneys, and one of them--I forget his name--was a brilliant attorney. I could just in awe listen to him talk about elements of the law, and they were assigned to protect Julian Nava.

Now, in part I suspect that this was because Mormons, that group of Mormons, two or three lawyers there, knew I was favorable to Mormonism, and I was favorable to Mormonism historically, so to speak. But when I was in community college in East L.A. Community College, one of my closest friends was a Mormon. Pincock was his name. I haven't thought of his name in how many years? Jerry Pincock. He's tall, and we became very, very good friends. He tried to persuade me to go to church, and I told him, "Well, later, but not now," this, that, and the other. But we became very good friends. Well, I later

learned through Jerry the Mormons keep track of people that they're trying to convert, and it's probably all put into a computer now, and so this legal firm that sought out my friendship long before this issue knew, "Julian, member of the Board of Education, Harvard Ph.D., prominent Mexican American, and it'd be great if we could get him to join the church."

And by this time, not through the law firm but separately--it's a network--another group of Mormons had gotten me to be on the advisory board of a Mormon-owned radio station in Los Angeles, KGIL? I seem to remember KGIL. Any case, all it did was nice music, that's all, not jazzy, sexy music, just nice music and reporting of news, positive news, Mormon-style. The advisory board met about every three months, and they paid us about \$400 for every board meeting, so I liked those board meetings. I always thought it was part of the recruitment effort. So we met with the lawyers at this firm, and within six months, within six months Nava was dropped as a defendant, but the savings and loan went bankrupt, and this other German American friend of mine lost a quarter of a million dollars, because the stock was then worth nothing. They now live in Carlsbad, and he's in very poor health I learned from a mutual friend. He's in a wheelchair. Luckily he had some other assets, so he wasn't impoverished, but he was broken, and it was part of an effort up and down the State of California to suffocate emerging minority-financial institutions.

Espino

Do you have evidence of that?

Nava

The only evidence is knowledge of two or three others the same thing happened, and que casualidad, okay? Because it was a frivolous case. By the time the savings and loan thing broke up, no charges were filed against anyone, but banking had stopped, just cutting the throat of the institution, and

since then there are virtually no Mexican-American-owned savings and loans or banks.

Espino

And you feel it was part of that same sentiment or that same fear that Mexican Americans or Chicanos wanted to--

Nava

Yes, sure, and blacks, too. Now, things have changed substantially in some parts of the country. Cuban Americans dominate the banking industry in Florida, but that's different. They're anti-Castro Cuban Americans with generous American government subsidies. There must be fifty if not seventy-five Cuban American owned banks in Florida, and those guys are also very well organized. They're very well organized. Good for you, you nuts. Anyway, they're all children of émigrés, they're not émigrés but children of émigrés. They're as American as you can be, but they still consider themselves, "Soy Cubano," and that's it. "Soy Cubano." And if you ever restored relations, they'd go back to Cuba and reorganize the economy of Cuba in no more than a couple of years.

But there was that movement in the politics and the feeling in the air and police activity of concern about the rising demands and coming of age of the black movement and the Chicano Movement, irrepressible, but you contain it in areas where you can contain it. Yes.

Espino

That's interesting, because it seems like at CSUN that was not the experience, rather the opposite. I mean, they were giving you funds to establish these new courses, to hire new faculty.

Nava

Different ballgame. Difference between soccer and football. It was a different ballgame. In other words, those elements that were fearful of minority groups could not operate on

campuses. It was that simple. It was a different ballgame. But in time there were two or three black appointed state university presidents and no Mexican American, so there was that hostility, or not--well, some hostility, but rivalry, and blacks, we could understand, were having their first chance to get some of the goodies, and we just simply said, "What about us?" "Well, we're going to have to wait." So I would jokingly say, "Well, we'll have to do it demographically," which has been gradually happening.

Espino

Your run for the school board, was that part of a coalition, work with other groups like African Americans?

Nava

Oh, yes.

Espino

Can you tell me just the very, very beginning of how that started?

Nava

Well, I think it was in October of 1966, a brother of a friend of the family, Dolores [Calderon] then was her name, called and he said, "A couple of us would like to get together with you." "Sure." At this time I was simply a professor. So they came out to Northridge and we got together, and then they told me, "Here's what's going on. A number of guys are trying to organize what we call the Congress of Mexican American Unity." Had you run across that term? "And we are going to try to select a candidate, a Mexican American candidate to run for the Board of Education." Blacks a year and a half ago or two years ago got the first black elected to the school board, Reverend James Jones, a Presbyterian minister, and this was accomplished by virtue of a coalition of black activists, Anglos, Anglo liberals, Jews very prominent in the movement, Jews, and some Mexican Americans that organized this.

Now, this was in the climate of the rising black movement and the sympathy of a lot of people for blacks. So Reverend James Jones, a safe man, was elected to the school board, the first black ever elected, and, of course, he started to do a very good job, because Jim, Reverend Jones was just a very smart guy and a very nice guy, and yet very intensely black in his thinking. So the Crosstown Coalition figured, "Well, now let's try to get a Mexican American on the school board." Mexican American students at that time were about 20 percent of the student body in schools. And so the Crosstown Coalition suggested to the handful of Mexican Americans involved in the Jones' campaign, "Well, look. You guys are going to have to get together, get your act together and present a nominee, and then the Crosstown Coalition will support that person. If three or four decide to run, why that'll split the vote," because you run at large [in the whole district], the primary and the runoff, and you run for a particular [numbered] office.

I think I ran for office number seven, held by Charles Reed Smoot, an honest guy, a good guy, and nonetheless a very conservative person in every respect, especially as it related to Mexican Americans. He once had remarked, "Mexican American kids don't do well in school because they're just lazy." Okay, there's an element of truth there, okay, but there are some things you don't say. In other words, they don't want to get ahead, that was really what he should have said and not that they're lazy. They just didn't see education as something that was significant in their life. Anyway, [that was] Charles Reed Smoot.

And so Richard Calderon, the name of this friend, brother of Dolores Calderon, a very, very longtime friend of my sister Rosemary [Nava], Richard said, "Julian, I think you would be a good candidate. Now, there are going to be a number of candidates that will come to the convention." "Convention?" "Yeah. We're going to meet in the Casa del Mexicano over in East L.A. on Euclid." "Yeah, I know where it is. Sure." "Just

south of 4th Street." "Yeah, yeah, Casa del Mexicano." Used to be a church that went caput and now it was a social center. He said, "We expect to have about ninety different Mexican American organizations, and we're calling ourselves Mexican American, okay. Come. And they will have votes according to their list of members. There'll be no fudging; the number of members on their membership lists will give them the number of votes. And it'll be a nominating convention like the Democratic Party, and so why don't you consider it?"

So I talked about it with Pat [Nava], and Pat didn't think it was a good idea, because she's not publicly civically involved or oriented, not at all. I thought she was, but it turned out she wasn't. I said, "Don't worry, Pat. I'm not going to get nominated anyway, and even if I was nominated, I'm not going to get elected. Elected within L.A. County? Do you know what that is? There's fifteen mayors and there's seven or so congressmen elected within that large an area. Don't worry about it. It should be fun." And, of course, I did care about the issues that were involved, so I became a candidate.

And little knownst to me, Richard Calderon, who has just died not long ago, he was a field representative for Congressman--his name will come to me, a congressman in East L.A., so he had a car and he had an assistant and he had telephones and he could move. So he was so well organized. It goes to show when we want to do something, we have people amongst us that can get it done. So he got a campaign started to gain votes for Nava in the convention, and so he got a battery of people to start calling members of the different organizations, arguing for Julian Nava, Professor Julian Nava, Harvard Ph.D., blah, blah, blah, he's taught in Spain and all that kind of stuff, and prepared some written materials that they mailed out.

So there were about five candidates at the final nominating convention on a Saturday or Sunday, I think it was probably a Saturday, and they were all good candidates. They were

teachers and activists and they were verbal, and the favored one was Manuel Guerra. Had you run across that name? Manuel Guerra, he was a professor of something or other, probably Spanish, at USC, very verbal, very germane, very nice guy. I had never met him before, but I think I knew of his name, because there weren't that many Mexican American professors anywhere within hearing. And Manuel Guerra was considered the strongest of them, so I was a latecomer. I prepared a speech and delivered my speech. Manuel gave his speech, a good speech, well delivered. I gave a good speech, well delivered, and each side had people cheering and raising and throwing up balloons. It was a lot of fun, great party. And then among the other candidates it was an awful lot of fun, the Congress of Mexican American Unity.

And then the ballots were taken, secret ballots, and it took, I don't know, about an hour and a half, not quite an hour and a half but about an hour to have them counted. And lo and behold, Nava got the majority of the votes, thanks to Richard Calderon's quietly telephoning, telephone, telephone, telephone, telephone. And the Manuel Guerra group protested, "Recount! Recount!" Parliamentary rules, blah, blah. We had a recount. That took another half hour or forty-five minutes, because now it was only between Manuel and Nava and not all of the votes. So Nava won again, and the Guerra group stormed out in protest, which was a shame, okay. They stormed out in protest, and everybody else said, "What are you complaining about?" after the recount. I guess what it came down to was they could not accept the defeat.

So about three or four weeks later the time came to turn in signatures, because you have to turn in signatures to get your nomination and have your name put on the ballot. I think about, I don't know, eight or ten thousand signatures. It's a fair number, because it's county-wide. So we turned in the signatures, and lo and behold, Manuel ran as well, and so this was a real letdown. And during the primary I must have given

a hundred if not two hundred talks in pockets all over, including not just Mexican Americans, because we knew Mexican Americans could not elect me. It had to be everybody else, and this is one thing that a lot of Chicano students found it hard to appreciate. They said, "We elected you." It didn't go over very well when I said, "No, you didn't. By the way, are you old enough to vote?" It was everybody else. We sold the goods. We sold the goods, and I got enough votes with other votes that were cast, including the Guerra votes, to deprive the incumbent of an absolute majority, and that meant there would be a runoff, Smoot-Nava.

Now, the history of board elections was such that an incumbent lost whenever he was forced into a runoff. That's what simply had always happened. Why? I guess because there was a runoff because a majority had not voted for him, and presumably enough of that majority then voted for the challenger. And soon after the election, the primary election, Pat, the kids, and I took off by boat--no, no, no. No, we went on an airplane, that amphibious airplane that goes to Catalina [Island], and we were in Catalina for three or four days just to get out of town, because as a matter of fact, knowing the history of runoffs, news media were after us like bees to honey, and so we got out of town. And people at the campus said, "Your chances of getting elected, Julian, are very good, because of the--," well, it's not a tradition, but because of the pattern.

And, yes, sure enough two months later the runoffs were held, and I'd again given more talks all over the place, and it was at one of those talks that I met Betty Richland, my first sweetheart, the Jewish girl, in the audience at the Jewish Community Center of Encino. And I was elected, and it was a big deal, invited to join all kinds of groups. The board met Tuesdays and Thursdays, and I had to rearrange my teaching schedule, and that pretty much snuffed out one aspect of my academic life, which was research and writing, because there

simply wasn't time. But instead what I started to do was to write textbooks. I showed them all to you, right? And that same intensity, I would have written a book on Venezuela, on Argentina or whatever, because I had an offer to teach at UCLA, I had an offer to teach, where else? I think it was Santa Barbara, and I turned it down because I was on the school board, and I knew I would not want to give up that in order to have a life at the university. Anyway, that was the decision I made. I've never regretted it.

Espino

Your degree was in Latin American Studies.

Nava

Latin American history, yes.

Espino

Latin American History. You're on the school board, and you're dealing with issues that don't necessarily relate to Latin American history. What became the important issues for you that drew you to that huge commitment?

Nava

Loyalty to Mexicanidad. I felt Mexican, and Pat was sympathetic, had learned Spanish by necessity in Spain. To go shopping she had to speak Spanish, and she liked it, and so she understood my concern, not with the same intensity, but she understood it. So I just realize the [Vietnam] War and things that were happening, that we needed people in leadership positions, and I had come to this conclusion when I had accepted Richard Calderon's and the committee's suggestion that I become a candidate for the congress. They said, "Julian, we don't have very many of you. You can't sidestep who you are," because Richard knew our family from East L.A., from poverty and the whole thing. He said, "We need people like you." So all of a sudden I was in the middle of

educational politics and invited to attend conferences and to give talks.

I remember one of the first, I think, successful talks was with the Princeton Institute of Learning. Now, that's not their name, but it's at Princeton, and they devise tests, national tests. So I went and gave them the gospel. I told them, "Your tests are a great impediment to minority groups and to the poor, and I'm here to represent the complaints of Mexican Americans."

"What do you mean, Professor?" And they had to listen to me because of the position, okay? That's why they invited me to go and talk. And I told them, "Well, I've looked at some of your tests." I said, "I've never had occasion before, but I've looked at some of your tests and they're very ethnically, socially slanted. You ask questions about golf. Well, Mexican American kids don't play golf. If you ask questions about baseball for intelligence and for cognitive ability," and a number of things like that. I said, "They're very being above par and below par. Well, Mexicans, the average Mexican American doesn't understand that. If you're above par that's bad. That means that you've used more golf swings. If you're at par or if you're below par, that means that you're ahead, and instead of seventy-five swings at a golf course you're at seventy-two, you're below par. Great, congratulations. But the Mexican Americans will think it goes the other way." So that was the pitch that I made with the Princeton Institute of something or another.

And I told them, "You're causing a great injustice, and I don't think that you've been doing this on purpose. You've been asking questions according to your background." And it was also the same argument that I think I mentioned to you before about eliminating I.Q. testing in L.A. schools, and that again caught regionally, and it may have had an impact nationally, I don't know. It's possible, because at that time, and it's still true today, what happens in New York and happens in L.A. is communicated and becomes known in all of the other large

school districts. Whatever New York and L.A. do, and when L.A. eliminated I.Q. exams and said, "Nothing like this will be put in students' cumulative cards," that [makes deflating sound] was known all over the place, so it's very possible that that had a national impact.

And when we also altered the very objective exams for placement of principals and vice principals, principals and vice principals, which had contributed to the absence of black and Spanish surname, or Filipino, or Japanese American in the lists for assignments or assignment to vice principals, after which you then can become a principal, these tests were not ethnically biased, but the salami was cut so thinly if, let's say, you would make it to an approved list at ninety-four out of a hundred, a complex series of exams, okay, and all the scores totaled up, if 300 people took the test for V.P.'s, you'd have a number of people at 93.75, 93.65, 93.3 or whatever. In other words, the scores were all--the top were all within one or two or three points, because everybody that applied was all very good, and you had about three different committees grade them on different aspects, then these scores were totaled. And you could make the argument, "Yeah, these exams are bias-free. Demonstrate to me why they're not." And you couldn't.

And so with the help of Reverend James Jones and two other board members that comprised the four majority out of seven board members, we simply added to the exams other factors that included particular personal and professional--no, it was personal and then some other things, social attributes of candidates that made them worthy of assignment to schools where those qualities would be valuable. I think the board rule was 4240 I think it was, Board Rule 4240, and so that immediately led to, of an exam which was held about every two years for, let's say, fifty assignees, for all of a sudden four or five blacks or four or five Hispanics to get approved, because they were only within a point or two of objectively getting assigned, but there were that many people above

them, but now a principal at Roosevelt got assigned because he could speak Spanish, or to Lincoln, or to Garfield, or to Belmont, or to San Fernando in the junior high schools.

So gradually--when I was elected to the board we had one high school principal, no, I think two, Hilario Peñas at Roosevelt, great guy, very Mexican, muy Mexicano, but he knew how to play the game. But he was very, very Mexicano and was good by all objective standards. Then Bill Zazueta at Birmingham High School, which was all Anglo, middle-class Anglo, a corner of the valley. He was Basque; Zazueta is a Basque name. But he did not identify at all with anything Mexican. He was Basque, and there were almost no Mexicans at his school anyway, although there were a few, because there was a pocket of Mexican Americans in Canoga Park. It has since grown, but there was a pocket there, most of them gardeners. But Bill Zazueta you could not count on for anything having to do with minority groups. He made it, straight-mannered, so only Hilario Peñas, and there was nothing he could do in the group of high school principals that got together to talk about counseling and whatever they talk about.

And within the end of my first term we had about four high school principals, four or five junior high school principals, half a dozen or so elementary school principals, and then accumulated more after that. The progress was not dramatic. It doesn't make the headlines, but you know if you're part of the system that now there are four Mexican American high school principals, and they get together because they know how they got their job. They got their job because of 4240. They were as good as anybody else within a point or two, which is subjective anyway, but they had these special qualifications, so that was one of the profound gradual changes in the school district leadership, administrative leadership.

So there are all those things going on, and that's about the time as this movement was getting started was when the walkouts took place, and the walkouts took place a year after my taking office in great part because of the excitement resulting from the election. Everybody was talking about education and reform and making demands, and again as if often the case, Sal Castro, as in the case of Chicano Studies, Rudy Acuña, individuals playing a significant role.

Espino

Did you anticipate that? Was it something that you saw on the horizon?

Nava

No. It was a surprise, no anticipation. What was happening was an increasing activity in the Mexican American community, educational community because of the election, but it started totally unexpectedly when I think it was at Lincoln, the V.P., Anglo, canceled the performance of a play, because the play had some derogatory language about the system and some profanity. It was some play. It was known, it played on Broadway and other places. So he said, "This is not appropriate," and so he canceled the performance of that play, which then got students mad, not just those that had been rehearsing and connected with it, but that's what started the unruly conduct at Lincoln and then the demands that the play be put on, and Sal Castro then encouraging students that met after school to speak up and to demand their rights, and their rights included a number of other things. In other words, the social awareness had gone down into high schools.

And Sal, I was not aware that Sal was personally involved in the school board race, but I know he was sympathetic and was among those that were active, but he was not a ringleader or so forth. And one thing led to another, and then at Wilson High School that same kind of rebelliousness rose, much of it inspired by knowledge that black students were doing the

same kind of thing. That's why I said earlier in some fashion that the Mexican American movement fed on the black movement. They were doing it, now we're going to do it, too. And the story of the walkouts is pretty well known by now. The movie [Walkouts] is well done. The movie is well done.

Espino

But how did you feel? Do you remember your feelings when you first heard that these kids had walked out of school? I mean, do you remember that moment when you became aware of that?

Nava

Well, first surprise and then confusion, because just why they were doing it was unclear. I knew that they were breaking the rules, and the school district immediately started to suffer financially, because the daily attendance count is registered in Sacramento and then in the next month or next quarter, whatever it is, school districts get money according to school attendance, and if all of a sudden 3,000 students aren't attending, hey, that's money. I had mixed feelings, pride, and I kind of felt like President [Barack] Obama, what the V.P. had done was kind of dumb, okay. Obama unfortunately used the word stupid. It was dumb, it was unnecessary. Other means could have been used, and then it got out of hand.

And I had to then, when asked by media, "What do you think about it?" I said, "Well, it's unfortunate, but the students should go back to school, because it's in violation of state law." "What are you going to do about it?" "We're not quite sure, but they should go back to school." I had to oppose the walkouts, and I was concerned also that some of the kids would get hurt, because I was aware that at that time we had a real hard-nosed chief of police, I don't remember his name, but a lot of police where we did not have many Mexican American police officers might start using their billy clubs, and kids might start throwing rocks at them, and someone might fire a gun and

who knows? And there had been incidents like that in connection with demonstrations regarding the war, so all of that was the climate, of protest against the war and defiance of authority, and gradually within a day or two the board members found out that Sal Castro was a leading figure among the walkouts and probably the only staff member that had been meeting with the students.

And the Board of Education has its own police department, so they immediately sent over people. They're not dressed in uniform, but they were school-district police, with the authority of a police officer by the way. They interviewed and listened and saw and said, "There's this teacher that's meeting with students after school, and his name is Sal Castro." So I did not know Sal personally, but through school-district information I got his telephone number, and so I called Sal from a public phone, because already I had concerns about the phone being tapped, and I told him, "Sal, school-district security knows about your activities, and I want you to know that you're being very closely watched. I'm calling you from a public phone, by the way," and probably as yet his phone was probably not tapped. But I said, "I'm assuming that we cannot talk in a secure manner on any of our personal telephones." So I said, "Just be very careful about what you say and what you do, because the police department will go after you for anything that you do or say that they can use as an excuse." And he said, "Okay, I understand you." He called me Dr. Nava, because we didn't know each other. And I alerted him therefore to the concern I had about his activities.

At about that same time the Brown Berets were organized by David Sanchez, a beautiful young guy, very smart and very tall, very handsome, a very nice person in every way, and his group was inspired by the Green Berets in Vietnam. But these were going to be the Brown Berets, so they put on brown khaki outfits that you could buy at any store and a brown-beret hat with, I think, some kind of a red button or something

on it, and the object of the Brown Berets was to avoid drinking, avoid smoking, avoid--pot was not commonly smoked at that time, oddly enough--avoidance of drugs, and a healthy, strong personal life. That was the Brown Berets, like the Green Berets, and athletic, very athletic, strong, healthy, boys and girls. But the police started thinking this is a paramilitary group and started to plant Brown Berets.

And during the course of this period of time Jerry Halverson, who was one of the leading attorneys for the school district, who was married to a Mexican American--I think she was a junior high school principal, I forget her name, a beautiful young gal--she was married to Jerry, so Jerry was very sympathetic to everything Mexican American because of his wife. And I dealt with him constantly at the school board, because we were talking about legal matters and so forth, and so we liked each other personally. So one evening after the school board had just finished its meeting, he slipped into my office, and he looked around to make sure there was nobody else within earshot, and he said, "Julian, I just heard that there's going to be a police raid on the Brown Berets' headquarters, and they're going to find some stuff." And I thought, you should know. "The raid will take place any time now." And then he left.

And he knew I would be discreet, like he was being discreet. So I got on the phone and called Luther. Luther was a great, big, handsome, big, strong, black board driver. At that time each board member had a car, and we had no board driver. There was a pool, but you could also always ask, "I'd like Luther," because he would talk about politics, and we'd talk about the black movement. He was a very conservative black, but very intense about the need for reform and progress, but he just disagreed with disorderly conduct and he was conservative in that respect, okay, law-abiding. So I called the board drivers' pool and said, "Luther there?" "Yeah, Dr. Nava." "Luther, I'm going right down. Start the car. We have to go

somewhere fast." "Yes, Dr. Nava." So I just folded up my briefcase and went downstairs in the elevator, because the carpool was down below the building, a building which has since been demolished. My god, what a waste of money. The L.A. School Board now is pendejos, but that's my humble opinion. They're building a high school there, a performing arts high school with a fantastic-looking building.

All right. So I went down there and sure enough the car was turned on already. I jumped in the back. We were supposed to ride in the back for safety reasons. So he said, "Where to, Dr.?" He started getting out of the building. I said, "To the Brown Beret headquarters on Brooklyn, the east side of Brooklyn just north of Brooklyn Avenue, Soto Street, on Soto Street." He said, "Yeah, I know where it is." And so he tore down Brooklyn Avenue, looking carefully, and even where there was a signal against us he went through, because we had E license plates, and so he got us over there right away and safely. [makes revving-engine sound] He pulled into the corner. The building is still there. And I said, "I'll be out in three minutes, so keep the motor running." He said, "Okay." So I went up the stairs and Brown Berets were all over, and they recognized me and saw the car pull in, and sort of like asking in their eyes, "What are you doing here? You're one of the bad guys." I said, "Is David around?" "David?" I said, "I want to see David." "He's over there." So I went back in there and then I told David, I said, "David, come outside. I want to talk to you." I didn't know him personally. He knew me, but I didn't know him.

So we went outside to the front and nobody else around. I said, "David, the cops are going to be here any minute. They're going to raid the joint, and they're going to find something illegal here. There is obviously a traitor in the group." And then I started walking down the stairs and got into the board car, which he recognized, and Luther [makes revving sound] took off. Well, as it turned out, I learned later

the police arrived. They must have been two traffic lights away, and they raided the place, making a show of looking for something. No warrant, okay, these are Mexicans after all, and then they got mad because they went to where they were supposed to find the stuff, pot in a plastic bag in the water reservoir of the toilet, and they went there and it wasn't there. In the three or five minutes after I left, David had said, "Look at everything. Under the desks, everything. Something is planted here." And someone found the pot. They tore the bag, flushed it down the toilet, and the cops then practically tore the place up pretending to find--trying to find what it was, but they didn't find it, of course.

And after that there were numerous occasions, numerous occasions when small groups of Brown Berets were on campuses or off campuses or came to school board meetings, and they always just went [makes gesture]. [laughs] In other words, Nava was okay. Nava was okay. I don't know if they ever found out the name of the plant, nor did they ever find out about Jerry Halverson, but they were set out to break up the Brown Berets. So there was all that kind of stuff going on, and you had to be careful of what you said and where you went and what you did.

Espino

Well, you said your driver understood the situation of discrimination--

Nava

Oh, yes.

Espino

--but he was against disorderly conduct? How did you feel about the students walking out or the Brown Berets' tactics?

Nava

Well, I felt the same way. In other words, on one occasion I told one of the other teachers involved with the walkouts--it wasn't Sal--I said, "Look. I'm proud of the students." "You are? You're not bullshitting me?" I said, "No, I'm proud of the students. But you know what? Enough is enough. They've made their point. They'll look better if they now go back to the classroom--they made their point--before something bad happens." So that's how I felt about it.

Espino

You said that David Sanchez or the Brown Berets looked at you as the enemy. Why do you think that was?

Nava

Well, I was part of the school board, and again, remember, you have to have enemies before you can have allies. I was an enemy in the sense that I was part of the establishment. They knew what I was trying to do for education, but to recruit more Brown Berets they had to oppose the school board, and the school board, the four-vote majority was engaged in doing what could be done at that level, namely to change school-board policies and practices. For example, I was able to get the school board to convene a meeting in the community to hear what the community had to say about public schools, and I think it was passed unanimously, but the school board had never had such a meeting. We asked staff, and they told us the largest school auditorium was at Lincoln High School of all places.

The second-largest was at Roosevelt, but we thought that Lincoln was a good place, and so we put out public announcements that people who wanted to address the school board could sign up to address the school board for three or four minutes, and time limits would be strictly observed, because about a hundred people signed up. They came down to the school board and they signed up. So on the given day the school board met at Lincoln High School, and the room was

packed, of course, orderly but packed, and it was a school board meeting. I forget who was president at the time that it convened, bang, bang, "The school board is now in session, and in order to hear the community we have a list of people here, and everybody [unclear] announcement is given three to four minutes," I think, "to speak. At three minutes you will have a yellow light go on. Please conclude your remarks, and at four minutes the microphone will be turned off. We must follow this rule because there is such a long list of people."

And so people of all ages addressed the school board. Nothing like that had ever taken place, and there were some people there that were leaders of the community groups, and among them was Reverend Vahac Mardirosian. He's one person that you ought to consider interviewing. He lives down here in Fallbrook somewhere. I've lost track of him. Reverend Vahac Mardirosian was an Armenian Mexican citizen who was as Mexican as you can be, because he was of Armenian parents born in Mexico. So he became a minister and organized a group of parents during the walkouts to encourage the parents to encourage the students to go back to classes, and they had many, many meetings in the community where they invited students to come and encouraging them to be orderly and respectful while energetic in their demands, but bearing in mind that they alone were responsible for their own personal conduct. So the group had a name that doesn't come back to me now, something like Los Padres de la Comunidad, something like that, and Vahac was very, very instrumental in cooling the temperature in the community.

Now, a number of other ministers became involved, and these were all Protestant ministers. There might have been some priests involved, but the church is always kind of above and beyond all of these things, much to its distress or disgrace, I think. Anyway, this movement met with PTAs and with other groups to keep the community down in temperature, and they made at the Lincoln High School auditorium meeting ninety-

two demands, the famous ninety-two demands, and handed them to us. And then it was over and everybody just gradually dribbled out. The meeting went on for about an hour and a half, maybe two, and it was recorded. I don't know whether there is a record on file, but UCLA might find out, because right now there's a Mexican American school board president who is Chicana, find out if there is still an extant recording of the Lincoln High School walkout meeting, because that would be primary evidence, a primary source. But there were men, women, and children, and some of them speaking in Spanish and others in English, but it was all Mexican stuff.

Espino

And the ninety-one demands came from?

Nava

Ninety-two demands from a group that was the core group of the community, whatever the community was, okay, but leaders.

Espino

And how did you resolve the demands?

Nava

Well, some of the demands were frivolous and others were very substantive. Some of them we had already started to do, like soliciting and recruiting and trying to hire more Mexican American teachers. And again, this was Mexican American, not black, okay? They were doing their own thing in other ways. We were trying to hire more teachers, but they have to be certificated, of course, so you just don't suddenly hire them. But the board members agreed that we would not debate, we would just listen. But later on in school board meetings when we started talking about some of these demands, then you did have some debates, and we sent out advertisements across the country recruiting Spanish surname, and that was the term that we preferred to use, Spanish-surname teachers. But even

that was complicated, because a Spanish-surname person from Mississippi would not necessarily qualify to teach in California and so forth, so really they had to be for the most part California-educated teachers who had their teaching certificate in a California school.

And so you can imagine, we were aware of the backup. It would take four or five years to have a significant number of qualified teachers. Now, at that time the schools were growing so rapidly in California that there were many emergency credentials, and if you had a B.A. with one semester of education courses, you could get an emergency credential and start teaching, but then you had to keep taking the other courses, so that's why I mentioned four or five years backup that it took before you'd start to have any significant number. Anyway, we very quickly started serving ethnic food in the student cafeterias. That was one of the demands. And we were broadminded. We started serving spaghetti and chicken egg foo yong and other stuff, and the staff made presentations to the board saying, well, this was all going to be very complicated, and so we asked them, "Well, didn't you have your master's degree in Berkeley in this kind of stuff?" "Yes, but we didn't learn how to make tacos." [laughs] You know, that kind of sometimes jocular--and burrito is not in the dictionary. I just jokingly said, "Well, look. Get on 4th Street and go east to just this side of Euclid. If you don't know where Euclid is, well, look it up, and on the south side, three stores back on the south side there's Vicky's, and Vicky's is owned by Vicky, Victoria, and she invented the burrito, and she'll teach you how to make burritos." [laughs] And everybody thought that was funny, and sometimes the L.A. Times reported on this dialogue.

But within a semester the attendance at lunch increased at the Mexican American high schools, and the revenue increased, because people could now have spaghetti and Chinese food and Mexican food and what else? I think those were the big

things. I don't think that Kosher food was an item; I don't think so. But things like that, and so by the time I left the board we had only satisfied, I think, about twenty of the demands, but they were the important ones, they were the important ones. So I think probably in time maybe sixty, but certainly the core of the ninety-two demands. Bilingual education was one of them, for example, and that's hard to do, and it takes time, and how do you proceed? And the textbooks, yes, textbooks, yes. Staff and, oh, yes, stopping the swatting, stopping the swatting.

So I remember the conversation when the principals came and addressed the board, arguing that swatting was a necessary form of discipline. And one of the principals of the Principals' Association turned out to be David Schwartz. Who's David Schwartz? David Schwartz was V.P. at Hollenbeck High School when I was at Hollenbeck, and I recognized him and he recognized me on the school board. So he gave his remarks arguing for retention of swatting, with some revisions so that the principals had come to agree that perforated swat paddles would no longer be used. Some were perforated, which meant that you could swat faster and they'd hurt more, and now they would just be plain paddles, but they still held that.

So I got into a colloquy with the coach, and I said, "Coach, you remember me, don't you?" I used the word coach, and he said, "Yes, I remember you, Dr. Nava." And I said, "You gave me a swat." "I did?" I said, "Yeah, and it was a good swat. Let me tell you why," I said. "I was caught in the hallway without a hall pass. I don't remember why I was in the hall without a hall pass." And then I said, "I was probably following some pretty Mexican girl." "Yay," everybody thought that was so funny. I said, "And so I was marched to your office, and I assumed the position, which was you bend over and grab your ankles." And I said, "It was a good swat. It hurt." And he said, "Any hard feelings?" I said, "No hard feelings, Coach," and I called him Coach, because that's what we had called him, Coach. I said,

"I had it coming. I broke the rules. I had it coming." And then I said, "Besides, what self-respecting Mexican kid could graduate from Hollenbeck without having been swatted at least once by the coach?" Everybody started [laughs]. "But Coach, I still don't think we should do it anymore. I want to vote for the motion." And so we stopped swatting.

And there were some other disciplinary things like that that we immediately just said, "Okay, no more of this." Some of them had to do with girls and searching them, like only a female teacher could search a girl student. But the demands were all good. They were all good demands. Some of them were frivolous, the ringing of bells and this, that, and the other, but the movement was healthy, constructive, and reputable, even the walkouts, because nothing at any school in the walkouts was ever damaged. Nothing was ever damaged, and another example of the orderliness, and quietly we took pride that we're not like blacks that had burned large parts of South L.A. They just plain burned it down.

Vahac Mardirosian organized a protest at the school board on one occasion, and the room was full, and there were, I think, three or four parents that made presentations, you know, all in favor of God and virtue. And then Vahac Mardirosian said, "We want action on these things tonight." Well, he knew by board rules unless it's insignificant, you can't approve a significant motion the same day. You go over to the next board meeting. You put it on the table, then you put it over to the next board meeting. So whoever was president at that time, it's a one-year stint elected by your colleagues, and the board president said, "Well, some of these things are substantive. We can't act on them tonight, but we'll act on them at the next board meeting." He said, "Well, we're going to stay here until you do." "Pardon me, Reverend, what did you say?" "We're going to stay here until you act on them." And there was some confusion and then we went on to other business, and sure enough when the board meeting was over, no one left the

auditorium. It was a pretty large auditorium. It probably held about 250 people, larger than the now auditorium downtown in a big sky-rise. So they stayed there, and so when the board left, we didn't want it on the record, but the board president asked security--we called it security--the head of the security said, "Do you want us to get them all out?" "Oh, no, no, no, don't get them all out. Just watch them, and make sure the building is open," so that two other bathrooms would also be available. And they stayed there all night.

And the next morning, by ten o'clock in the morning--it was not a board day--they all quietly left, and it turned out that maintenance informed the board president that, "No, no, we didn't have to do anything. The board room was completely clean, just like it was before a board meeting." So the Mexican American parents had just picked up every single thing as a show of respect for education. I don't think it was a feeling of, "We're not like them," okay? It was just, "This is the way we conduct ourselves." And whatever the requests that were made, we acted on most of them. So it was a period of three or four years when there were a lot of things going on, and most of these were reported in the press, the more important ones, and a lot of them were also reported in other school districts, and I had numerous invitations to go to school districts outside to talk about this, that, and the other, and I always went.

One that I refer to on numerous occasions talking about these things is a visit to Laramie, Wyoming, where the school board sincerely wanted impressions about how to help their Mexican American students do better. It turns out that a sizable number in a school district of maybe 5,000, maybe 800 now were--not that many, but maybe 500 were now Mexican American, and these Mexican American students came from families of Mexican ranch hands that were brought up by ranchers to handle the cattle. And it turns out I learned while there from these people themselves--school board members

had all met for a farewell supper at a great steakhouse--that young people from Laramie were now reluctant to get on horses and ride out taking care of the cattle. They just didn't want to do it anymore. In fact, far too many of them were leaving Laramie and going to live in big cities. There was this flux, this loss of youth which happens in much of the Midwest of the country. They're born, they're raised, they're educated, they even go to universities. Then they go to Chicago or Philadelphia or New York. It's a brain drain.

And so the ranchers were bringing up in their own jets Mexican ranch hands from northern Mexico, because you don't have that kind of ranching in much of central or southern Mexico. It's northern Mexico. And the guys would come up with their own Mexican saddles and their own Mexican ropes, which are thicker than American ropes and they're stiffer, and a totally different saddle, and they would house them in trailers way out of town. But these Mexicans would find ways of smuggling their women up, and they started to have their families out there, and the ranchers lamented it but didn't protest, because then the Mexican ranch hand would leave. He wanted his wife and two kids up there with him, so that was the origin of the Mexican kids coming into schools.

Schools, elementary schools and the other schools, mostly elementary, went out in buses and picked up the kids, so you had this kind of symbiotic relationship between these undocumented, admittedly undocumented cattlemen and the local establishment, not just the ranchers that depended upon them, but local education people. And these ranch hands had a tough job, because they went out there under terrible conditions. They'd be gone a day or two out in open ranges, federal lands that these local people leased for a dollar an acre a year or something like that, in effect heavily subsidized by the federal government, and this had to be done also in winter. And so as I put it on a couple of occasions, "The hamburgers we were eating in McDonald's came from

undocumented ranch hands taking care of the cattle year around."

Anyway, some of the Mexicans that were not supposed to go into town went into town, took up with local girls and formed families with local Anglo or American girls, so you had this development taking place as well, and I think that helps explain, I guessed that helped explain why American Wyomans were also concerned about this situation in schools, because they had Americans in the families, always a woman, not a man, because it was the Mexican man that came into town. So it was an example of how more and more sectors of American society had been becoming dependent on Mexican labor and how this had an impact on schools. So I would talk to the principals and teachers about how Mexican kids are, things like if you scold a Mexican boy or a girl, they will tend to always look down. And the teacher will say, "Look at me," and they'll look down. And I said, "It's not a lack of respect. It is respect. That's the way they have been brought up, not universally but 99 percent. They'll look down, and so don't browbeat them for that. Let them look down, and when they finally look up you will gradually get them accustomed to looking at you in the face, in the eyes, when you're telling them, 'You're supposed to do this,' or, 'You're not supposed to do that.' And then they will act American."

And how also to identify the leader among the Mexican boys. I said, "There will always be a leader, and it will be self-generated. No one elects them. He's just, he's the leader, and what he says goes. The boys and the girls will follow his lead, so identify that leader and then talk to him after school and tell him, 'Jose, I need your help.' Do you realize what that means to little Jose if the teacher says, 'I need your help'? 'Look, Jose. When I come into the classroom, it would be so very nice if everybody became quiet and stopped talking so I could begin the class, because I feel embarrassed or whatever, or it upsets me the way things are. Jose, do you think you

could help me with that, get the kids to be quiet when a teacher comes into the classroom?' And the next day, guess what? The Mexican kids are quiet when the teacher comes into class. Why? Because Jose said so." And so little tips like that about class and authority among the Mexican students, who always kind of clung together because they were a small group among others.

And I encouraged them to hire some teachers who spoke some Spanish, that kind of stuff, and remind them some of these kids are smart. [laughs] It may not be apparent, but talent is distributed at random. I mean, that's nature. I'll say, "Look at me. I was probably a dumb little Mexican kid," and then I'll tell the story about Mrs. Aukie and Mrs. Strong and Mrs. Benton that got me started in thinking, I'm all right, I can do things. So I did a lot of talking like that all over the Midwest. Sometimes they'd give me the exorbitant not just airfare and hotel, but a couple of hundred bucks, but I went for the effect and not for a couple of hundred bucks to Laramie, Wyoming, and a good steak dinner.

But that was part of the school board that is the projection of the school board beyond the district, and, of course, teaching at CSUN. So my life was [snaps fingers several times] just like this, and I still have the habit of always--in fact, I can see it from here, my little appointment book, because I had to have that with me constantly, because of, "What's next?"

Espino

Next time I'd like to talk about your role in bilingual education, bi-cultural education, because it sounds like your example that you just gave was something that you also had to do even in Los Angeles, where you had to educate teachers on the differences between certain student populations and how they learn or how they behave, or how they react to a certain situation. So I'd like to talk about that next time, because I

think I don't want to lose the rest of my recording, so I'm going to stop right now.

1.4. Session 3 (August 4, 2009)

Espino

This is Virginia Espino and today is August 4, 2009. I'm interviewing Dr. Julian Nava at his home in Valley Center, California. Dr. Nava, I wanted to start with whatever you remember about the Community Service Organization, the CSO. I understand your brother was a founding member, but what participation did you have, or what involvement did you have in the organization, if any?

Nava

I attended the meetings at the encouragement of my older brother Henry [Nava], and all of the leaders were veterans, and so later on in my writing I called it the G.I. generation of Chicanos, before they were called Chicanos. I have the feeling that this G.I. generation was the beginning of what later on came to be called the movement, because the earlier generation was mostly oriented around labor unions and purely economic issues, and these were the parents or the uncles of the G.I.'s. But people like Tony Rios, who I think has just passed away, and Ed [Edward] Roybal, and my brother Henry and a handful of others that I got to know, founded this group in order to start fighting discrimination. The most important form of discrimination at that time was housing, because G.I.'s could get homes under the G.I. Bill of Rights, but there were many places that resisted selling homes to them under one excuse or another.

So housing was a major issue, as well as voting, because again there was a lot of discouragement in a number of different ways to keep Mexican Americans from voting. But these G.I.'s simply would not take that stuff, and so they put pressure on the County Registrar of Voters, and I remember that one of

the early victories was to ease up the requirements for people to become Registrar of Voters Deputies, which really meant that you simply had to be eighteen or over and identify yourself completely American citizen, and then you could start to walk around. So one of the early efforts of the group was to walk around door to door, encouraging people to register to vote and therefore immediately identifying those that were citizens or were not citizens. At that time, antedating the movement of undocumented, almost everybody was here legally, or they were citizens. The immigration of undocumented people began considerably after the end of the Second World War. The only people that were here up to that time were not in the cities, they were contracted farmworkers.

So registering to vote was number one, fighting forms of discrimination, and they met at an East Side church hall, and I went with Henry almost all the time and became involved before I was able to vote, because if I remember at that time you couldn't vote till you were twenty-one. But I was eighteen, so I could become a Registrar of Voters. So we would have contests to see who had registered more people and carefully so that the forms would not be disqualified, because all registrar papers are closely watched, but to make certain everything was correct.

So the activities finally led towards running someone to the City Council of Los Angeles, and I forget the name of the councilman who was in office at that time. I think he was an Irishman. So Ed Roybal was drafted or volunteered to become a candidate, and he lost the first election and then two years later when another city council seat was open, and this one I do remember now was in Councilman District 9, he ran again. What I remember was not just the meetings that were run in a rather orderly Roberts Rules of Order manner, but that the younger people--only one of the other names, well, Joe Castorena's name comes to mind and then Sally and then

other girls and guys high-school age went out putting up posters, campaigning for Roybal.

And the police--this was illegal. You should not put them on telephone poles. And the way we beat the police was a system whereby one of the volunteers who was larger squatted down, grabbed the pole, hugged the pole, someone jumped up on their shoulders with the Roybal sign with tacks already pushed through it and a hammer in their teeth, and then they grabbed the pole, too, and then the person down below stood up. So this meant that the Roybal sign was up above anybody who could bring it down unless they had a ladder, and so our signs plastered the Ninth District, and it was just fun for us, because after all the posting was up we would just gather somewhere to have a Coke or something like that, not beer as I remember clearly. It wasn't that kind of a crowd. So we just gathered and put up thousands of these, and so that was our participation, because we could not vote.

And the second time Ed ran, he was elected, and it was, of course, an earthquake-like result that shook up the city, and it was noted statewide and to some extent nationally that Roybal was elected. And all during this time, why, before and usually after the CSO meeting, especially those who had been putting up the signs, met at Roybal's house, where his wife Lucille [Roybal], who I've often thought was as important as Ed in the whole Roybal saga, because she was just a wonderful person, and I remember very clearly because as in our case, houses, the front doors were not locked. If they had a screen door, the screen door was closed, but you would just walk in. "Hi. Come on in." So we would gather there, fifteen or twenty young people and some of the CSO people with postmortem remarks on the meeting, and be there till maybe ten, ten-thirty, then everybody would split. And Lucille always had some lemonade or something like that for us to drink.

So it was really a community-organizing group in the sense that people were brought together from all over Greater L.A.,

because it was not just the people for that district, but others that realized that this was potentially significant. There were some Jewish folks involved, some Anglo folks involved, two, three, or four blacks involved. It's a shame that I don't remember their names, but at that time I certainly did know. It was really a mixed group, so it was not just Mexicans, it was blacks and it was Jews and it was Anglos. And it was the beginning, I think, of what later on grew to be an L.A.-countywide coalition of people that got together that many years later helps explain the election of James Jones, their black Presbyterian minister, to the Board of Education.

So we had trouble with the police, because the police were out after us, trying to figure out--trying to catch us--who was putting up these Roybal signs eight feet above the ground, eight or nine feet I guess. And so the whole thing was very structured, because some of the gals were stationed in the four directions a block away from wherever the folks were putting up the posters, to blow a whistle if they saw what looked like a police car. You could usually tell police cars, because they were black-and-whites. So the whole thing was very well organized, and it was, as I recall, an awful lot of fun, just an awful lot of fun, and it was not motivated by anger or hate but just simply, we can do this.

And the meetings were very well structured. They were involved with school issues and community issues and getting people involved in politics, so the CSO really was the first, I think the first such group ever organized. There were some comparable groups in Texas, like the G.I. Forum, which again was veterans, and I think in Texas were also the first that became truly effective, and then, of course, the G.I. Forum started to concern itself with statewide issues more so than local issues, and national issues became very well known. But in California it was the CSO that then inspired similar groups in the valley, in the San Joaquin Valley. I don't remember about the San Diego area.

But one of the principal organizers, in the sense of counselor, was Fred Ross. Have you run across his name? Okay. He was from Chicago, although he was born and raised in the Midwest, I think Oklahoma, so he was an Okie and admitted it and identified completely with the downtrodden and the wretchedly poor, because that was his upbringing. He went to this community-organizing school in Chicago, organized by a prominent wealthy Jew whose name I don't remember now, but you probably have it, or do you have a record of it? Is it Saul Alinsky? No, it wasn't Saul Alinsky. Any case, the name might come to me, but it was a community-organizing group in Chicago that trained people to do the kind of things that the CSO did.

Espino

I think it was Saul Alinsky.

Nava

It might have been. Any case, Fred Ross was sent out here, and I don't know the details of all he--Fred Ross and Tony Rios and my brother Henry, because the three knew each other, got together. But Fred was the critical person in terms of helping the group to organize, with the copies of Roberts Rules of Order and so forth, and it was during this time that Fred somehow met a young César Chávez and brought him to CSO meetings. Now, Fred was country-bred, countryside-bred, and so he was attracted to César however they met, because César was focused on agricultural issues. And so César learned about community organizing and about Roberts Rules of Order, which, of course, was another world, but, of course, it's wonderful as a way to gather people and organize them to govern themselves and proceed with getting things done.

So once the CSO was very strong and had its own headquarters and had a budget and things like that, Fred now on the city council, and Henry became chairperson and then Tony Rios. I always chuckle because Tony Rios was the kind of

a person who wanted to get reelected, and nominally the task was a one-year task, specifically to avoid the development of empires, but Tony made it into an empire and got reelected time and time and time again, so later on people thought of the CSO as Tony Rios or Tony Rios as the CSO, which I think-- by that time I was off in college, first Pomona and then Harvard. I thought it weakened it, because you can't help but have personality issues arise, and one antidote is rotating officers. Anyway, Tony did a good job, I can't fault him.

So those are the kinds of things that I remember about the CSO, and the time came then that I left East L.A. Community College and was in Claremont constantly struggling because of the academic demands there. All the students were so well prepared, and I really had to work, and I didn't have any car, so I rarely came back home to East L.A. Then from there three years at Harvard [and a year in Caracas], so I was out of the movement. It wasn't called the movement yet, but we can call it the movement with a lower-case m, the resurgence. Or really, it was practically really the beginning, the genesis of the Mexican American Movement, because during the thirties there wasn't much going on, and it was mostly associated with labor unions, who were interested in that aspect of civic life and not in community organization. No problem with that, that was their thing.

So I was out for five, [six] years, and a lot of things happened while I was gone. But I do remember that there still was no one elected to Sacramento. Entrenched interests, not anti-Mexican interests but just entrenched interests made it hard, and then once you started dispersing your organizing efforts, that made it harder than concentrating on just L.A. I don't remember who was the first Mexican American elected to the State Assembly [Phillip Soto and John Moreno elected in 1962], but if someone wants to find out they could find out. And, of course, interestingly enough, the time came when more and more were elected and smarter and smarter young

people till where they came to be Speakers of the Assembly and head of the California Democratic Party [like Art Torres], and who would have thought it in 1948? That was just something--I don't think we even dreamed of it.

Espino

Did that open your eyes, well, your involvement in the CSO, to political life and a desire to become an elected official yourself?

Nava

Well, not to become an elected official, but just to be active in whatever I can do. Yes, and when I got my degree, my first teaching job was in Puerto Rico, because it was a period in our economy like today, where there were very few jobs available, and even with a degree from an Ivy League university or a Berkeley or UCLA there just were no jobs. I remember that the best job offer I got was in Nebraska, in some religiously associated college in Nebraska. I think I talk about it in my memoirs. They finally offered me a job as long as I would carry a pretty heavy load, four classes and coach the tennis team as well, and when I was talking to the department chair on the phone--I think I was in Cambridge. He called me. He said, "And, of course, we notice that you're single." "Yes, I am." He said, "Faculty are not permitted to fornicate in town," and he used that biblical term. And so I made the mistake innocently of saying, "By the way, where was the nearest city?" And he took it in a bad way. I just wondered because this was a small-town college. "Where is the nearest city where you can go to, to movie houses or whatever?" And so he politely said, "Well, we think that this may not be the right place for you."

And instead, a month or so after I got through a fellow graduate student introduced to the Dean of Humanities at the University of Puerto Rico, who was in Cambridge looking for a staff, and that story is in the book. So that's how I went to teach in Puerto Rico, so again, two years out of L.A. politics,

and came back when I got word that Mother had terminal cancer, and came back to Cal State University Northridge, which was literally a brand-new college where there were almost as many faculty the first semester as there were students. But it grew steadily and then bigger and bigger, and it grew faster and faster. But this was in the San Fernando Valley, and it was there that I met Rudy [Acuña] and Ed Moreno, and they were both teachers, Ed I think junior high school, and Rudy had just finished his degree at USC and had got his M.A. degree and was teaching at Pierce.

And then there's that story about how--I think we spoke about it before. But that was the beginning of getting involved in barrio affairs, because Rudy and Ed were involved with Mexican American professionals, teachers and I remember one prominent dentist in Sylmar in San Fernando, where there's a substantial number of our folks, and that's where I started becoming involved.

Espino

There was a group, the Latin American Civic Association--

Nava

Yes, LACA or something.

Espino

That was a valley organization.

Nava

That was a valley organization in the northeast valley, sure.

Espino

Were you a member of that as well?

Nava

Yes. Yes.

Espino

Did you attend many of the meetings?

Nava

Not many, but every now and then, especially when there was something interesting or significant like a fundraiser being organized, and that was because being a young faculty member you are surviving for existence--there's just so much to be done getting ready for your classes, because you want to be hired the next year, so I didn't really have much time to get involved, but I was involved and was considered part of the group. What was that dentist's name? I think his name was [Rudy] Ponce. He was well-to-do and he was very generous at that level at that time in helping fund things, and so a relationship with Latin American Civic Association ultimately led to connections that produced, once I was elected on the school board, the first trial or pilot program for bilingual education at the parochial school in San Fernando.

Father [Luis] Balbuena and our superintendent, who by now had become Bill Johnson, who was a Catholic, Irish Catholic, and Father Balbuena set up this program, and it was kind of far-thinking on the part of Bill Johnson to have the children at that school get public-school credit for taking courses in bilingual education, and that led to, to my knowledge, L.A. becoming the first large or metropolitan school district to start bilingual education, and that was because of Bill Johnson and his relationship, friendship with Father Balbuena, who I remember was tall. He was very Castellano. I mean, he spoke like a Castillian, which is Spanish but very clear, crisp Spanish, and exceedingly good looking, and everybody loved him. He was a great guy, very progressive. He was a new kind of Catholic priest, and so it turns out how that became a factor in the genesis, in the beginning of public-sanctioned bilingual education.

Espino

Was he Spanish, from Spain?

Nava

Oh, yes, he was from Spain. Yes, he was from Spain.

Espino

And he worked in a church that had a Mexican American population?

Nava

Yes, oh, completely Mexican American population. I forget the name of the church, because I'm not a Catholic, but I knew it like my address. Yes, it was a parish that was--it's still there.

Espino

Well, do you remember some of those early discussions of bilingual education and some of the ideas that were going around at the time, why it was needed, why it was important, or even criticisms of it? Because there was also the thought that if you were bilingual you had some sort of intellectual deficiency. How did you negotiate all those different--

Nava

Well, for a long time there wasn't much discussion, because it was new. I mean, the natives didn't get restless until it was instituted in the school district, so to speak, and there was something to target. But the assumption was on the part of people like Rudy and Ed Moreno, Father Balbuena and the dentist friend and others that so many of the kids did not speak English well, and they simply couldn't understand the teacher, and so how could we expect them to learn much? Now, some did pick up English quickly, and that's the immigrant story and the best argument for complete immersion, that only that brings the kids, especially in elementary, to where they learn the other language.

But there was also the cultural aspect of it, that having bilingual education meant that you could talk about the Cinco de Mayo and the 16 de Septiembre and [Benito] Juarez and

Pancho Villa and the revolution, and inspire young people to start to believe that we can get things done, and that is best done in your own language, the music and dance, traditional Jarabe Tapatio dances and so forth. So it was both a cultural and a pedagogical argument that was made, and Father Balbuena, who was so very proud, of course, of Spanish, and Bill who was Roman Catholic, he just listened to Father Balbuena and finally went along with him. It was really Father Balbuena, who must still be alive. The last time I saw him I thought he was in exile in some small parish in San Pedro, and I had the feeling when I went out of my way to find out where he was, and San Pedro after all way down there, that he looked kind of like browbeaten, and I think he must have got into some difficulties in Sylmar-San Fernando. That wouldn't surprise me, because he was so good looking, but that's an unkind--but what the hell, why not--possible reason that he was just transferred.

But the idea was cultural and pedagogical, and all of the people that were active, like Ed, who was a public school teacher, and Rudy Ponce, that was his name, the dentist who had also served in Europe, they knew perfectly well that kids in Europe were running around speaking two languages, and it didn't seem to blow out their computer, and so why not our kids? What's wrong with speaking two languages? So the argument was also being advised that speaking two languages is better than just speaking one, and so that's the argument that won the votes on the L.A. school board, to start pilot programs in various schools on a voluntary basis of bilingual education.

Espino

Was the philosophy of the bilingual education to have all instruction in Spanish and then have a certain period of time where you have English instruction?

Nava

It varied, and the option was up to schools, because there are good arguments as to which is the better approach, and I don't think there's a better approach. Whatever works is good. But the goal was to be bilingual and to ultimately have English as the dominant language, because we're an English-speaking country. But once the Chicano Movement got started, these were not veterans, okay? They started thinking, probably inspired by the black movement, they started talking about isolation, exclusivity, and making English-speaking people speak Spanish. And I remember I got into a number of discussions, said, "What are you talking about? It's crazy? This is the United States, it's not Mexico." "Well, it's the Southwest." "Oh, bullshit, not in the way you mean it."

And so it led to a split within the Chicano Movement among those that started talking about separation, like [Rodolfo] Corky Gonzales and others, and the slightly older people like myself, that generation just five or six years older, thought of inclusion and immersion while being bilingual, and not, "Don't date an American girl," "Don't date an American guy." Well, they didn't have the sense to do it, but I remember I argued at the time, "If you want to buy exclusivity, then fine. Let's get a program started whereby we buy from only Mexican merchants. You want to buy a Ford? Buy a Ford from a Mexican merchant. If there's no Ford merchant in the valley, then find out where there's a Ford merchant. If you want to buy a General Motors car, let's buy from ourselves. The market can be enormous." Grocery stores, there were still plenty of mom-and-pop or neighborhood grocery stores, although most of them were not owned by Mexican Americans. It was just the beginning of the flood of big supermarkets, where then it didn't matter anymore.

But I argued at that time for economic, a concentration of economic power, but immersion socially and politically, arguing, "Look." Oh, by that time I had come and more people would listen to what I said. I said, "I was not elected by the

Mexican American vote," and some took that as an insult, but that's a fact. Take and look at the voting records. I carried everything around Beverly Hills. I carried West L.A. I carried the south part of L.A., and so that was my argument and that was at that stage. [bells ring in background] My little grandson just loves that. It starts to go and he runs over there and looks up at it, and he just points at it and points at it. He wants me to pick him up and get him real close. So the other day I told Pat [Lucas Navas], I said, "Whenever the time comes when we do our will and dispose--." Like those two chairs are very early nineteenth-century chairs. Pat's mother got them at some antique place, because she was an antiquer, and they're so nice Pat doesn't want me to sit on them. [laughter] Only company sits on them, and then she avoids that by putting the dolls up on them, so people have to sit in the other chairs. Isn't that crazy? We're all funny, okay. And I told Pat, I said, "We ought to will the bim-bam," we call it the bim-bam clock, "to little Leo," because the other grandchildren, they look at the clock and say, "Fine." But since infancy he's got a fixation on the clock.

Espino

Sounds beautiful. Anyway, so back to what we were talking about--

Nava

The CSO [Community Service Organization] was really a watershed. There's Mexican American civic and political life is before and after, along with what I call the G.I. generation.

Espino

Did you coin that term would you say?

Nava

Yes. Yes, I coined it, to my knowledge. I was the first guy to start talking about it.

Espino

Do you remember how early it was when you realized that that was a specific generation that could be labeled in that way?

Nava

Oh, I don't think it was until about the sixties when I was teaching and I persuaded our Department of History to let me offer a course on the history of the Mexican American. I'm sure there was another one somewhere else in the country, but I think it was one of the very first, because there were very, very few state universities that were oriented that way, and certainly not the University of California. They came in about fifteen years later. They might have been in Texas, but--and that's when I started to realize these things, when you go back and you notice, you start to put the pieces together, because in Texas and in California that's what happened, and it was G.I.'s that, some of whom like Hector Garcia--he was a Roybal-like figure in Texas. And then another professor in New Mexico, who was a Texan and had come to know Lyndon [B.] Johnson in college--I think I tell that story. Do I, in the-- because sometimes I don't remember what I've put in, because the point comes--come on, I was writing to my grandchildren by the time they would be, let's say, high school and could count their fingers.

But this Mexican American, studious, polite, mild-mannered, went to college with LBJ and helped LBJ get a degree, because LBJ was pretty dumb or didn't concentrate, and so he relied greatly on this Mexican American guy. Well, they weren't called Mexican Americans. That again was something that the G.I. generation demanded and got, Mexican Americans. And so the two became very, very close friends and when LBJ got his college degree to be a teacher, because his grades were not very good he was sent to teach in a Mexican school, a segregated Mexican school in some Texan down, god knows where, probably down in the valley, and that's when he came

to live among Mexicans. He knew Mexicans before, but now he was in a barrio school and learned Spanish, and he already knew Mexican food, but he came to love Mexican food and beer, and, of course, he was very foul-mouthed, famously foul-mouthed and vulgar, and his Mexican friend came down to teach in New Mexico, and he told me at a meeting that took place in El Paso, convened by LBJ once he was president, the first meeting ever of Mexican American intellectuals or people studying Mexican Americans--you know about that El Paso meeting?

In October 1967 I had been recently elected to the board, so I was asked to give a ten-minute talk in writing, and all of the presentations were put into a bound collection which exists probably in research libraries, okay--I'm sure Harvard has it. They have everything. And Johnson insisted that every member of his Cabinet give a talk on how their Cabinet and its responsibility could serve the needs of Mexican Americans. That's not commented on, but it was enormously significant. Well, soon after [John F.] Kennedy died and Johnson was in the White House, Johnson called up this professor, what's-his-name, and boomed in, "Jose [Martinez]--Jose, god damn it, you son of a bitch. Where have you been? It took the FBI to locate you." That kind of--that's the way he is. And this friend told us that he always called him Lyndon. "Lyndon, it's so good to hear your voice. How do you like the White House?" blah, blah, blah, blah, two old buddies talking, because they hadn't seen each other in a good number of years.

And then it was actually this Mexican professor who had tried to call the president, and the secretary would not put him through. You know, who's this guy? He's not on the list. There's a list of people that you put through. Others you say, "Well, let me take your message." So this prof told us over scotches--there were about six of us in this bar, and so we were all reminiscing about things that we remembered. And then if I remember right he said, "Miss So-and-so, would you

honor me with your name?" "Well, I'm Miss So-and-so." "I think you would do the president a favor if you simply told him that Joe Blow is calling him." "What is your title?" "It doesn't really matter. You'll be doing the president a favor if you told him that Jose Martinez is calling him." And she resisted, and then he said, "Frankly, you'll get in trouble when he finds out you wouldn't put me through." So she felt threatened and said, "Just one moment, please." And that's when LBJ came in, "God damn it, you son of a bitch! Where in the hell have you been?" Lying, "It took the FBI to find you." He'd called LBJ.

And so they talked, and so LBJ, having spent much of his life among Mexicans, knew the protocol, and after he went through all the social things he came to the punch line. "Tell me, what can I do for you?" "Well, Lyndon, this is what it is. As you know, we have terrible problems in education and economics and politics." "Yes, I know. Tell me about it." And then it wouldn't surprise me, LBJ says, "What does this come to? How can I help?" So this Mexican professor said, "Well, we have to know what in the hell is going on, Lyndon. Why don't you convene a meeting of experts on Mexican American affairs to meet and compare notes and then find out what the government could do that would help?" "Damn good idea! Who in the hell is going to do it?" "I'm sorry, I'm tied up at the university." And then LBJ or he said, "Hey, there's this guy, Vicente Ximenes," or something, a Texan, of course. "I'll tell him."

And so sure enough what evolved was that LBJ called this guy he knew in Texas and said, "I want you in the White House." "In the White House?" "Yes, god damn it. Get your ass over here." That's the way he talked colloquially. So Vicente went to the White House as presidential counselor on Mexican American affairs, and it was Vicente who found out who throughout the country was known as having published books, as giving talks, giving courses, none of that yet, but activists, academically qualified who would give a talk and not just

someone, a union organizer, and that's how I got an invitation. I'd just recently been elected. So we all met in El Paso and gave these talks, and I gave on education, where I referred to bilingual education as one of the ways of breaking down the barrier until the children become fluent in English.

And for many years I kept the proceedings of that meeting, which about five or six months later were mailed out to everyone who gave a talk, and it was a package like about that thick in a beautiful khaki-green plastic folder with the White House seal on it. It might be deposited not at Cal State L.A., because I was still pissed off at them, but either at CSUN--it might even be at UCLA, and it's the only one. Every now and then I would ask people, "Hey, have you seen a copy of this?" "No. How did you get it?" "I got it because I was a speaker." So it was a limited printing, so to speak. But every member of the Cabinet had to go and give a talk. And so after we gave our talks--it was a three-day conference--that's when a bunch of us were meeting at the hotel and having drinks and what's-his-name gave us that story about how that meeting came to be. LBJ told his assistant, "Whatever you want. Whatever you want. My secretaries can tell Cabinet members to get in line," and so they all [growls] got in line and made their presentation.

So I call that really the beginning of the intelligentsia stage, because guys met and gals, too, guys and gals met that didn't know each other, and now we had telephones and addresses, because that's all we had at that time, and could be in touch with each other, and that started the development of a nationwide network. I don't remember if Puerto Ricans--no, they were not involved and neither were the Cubans involved. It was Mexican, because LBJ--and then, of course, LBJ as part of the recommendation created the Office of the Director of Mexican American Affairs, and Ximenes was the first one. And blacks did not have someone in the White House with that assignment. Neither did Indians or Asians or Jews, only

Mexicans. And after LBJ's terms, when [Richard M.] Nixon was elected, he kept that office. I don't whether it was as significant, but coming from California and counting votes, Nixon kept that office. It went to one and another person, and when [Gerald] Ford was elected, came into office taking over from Nixon, who had to resign, he abolished the office. Ford being a Swede and a member of dumb Swedes, so to speak, he simply figured, what are we going to do, have an office for every ethnic group in the country? And he just ended the office, not with bad feelings but saying, "This special treatment is really not called for. They can get by on their own, like we did. Here I am."

So those things that happened were unplanned, and some of them were significant, unrelated to the CSO, but the CSO produced movements in other states as well as California and developed talent like César [Chávez], who then went to the valley, and Fred Ross went with him. He left the CSO saying, in effect, "You guys don't need me anymore. You've got a handle on L.A."

Espino

So the meeting that you attended in Texas, it wasn't people like César and Fred Ross, it was a different type of activist?

Nava

Different, different type of activist, not upper in the sense of snobbery, but professors, scholars, researchers, not all of whom were Mexican. A Cabinet member was not Mexican, of course, and there were other people, because by now there were maybe half a dozen non-Mexican American scholars of Mexican American life.

Espino

Would you consider them of the G.I. generation? Or veterans? Except for the women, possibly.

Nava

Yes. They were that age. They were in their thirties. They were in their thirties. One of them is still very active at Cal State San Diego. He heads a program on immigration; I forget his name. Yes, that was just a whole flood of people, flood so to speak.

Espino

Do you feel like you gained anything tangible from that meeting?

Nava

Oh, yes. I got a long telephone list of people and contacts, and since I was on the school board and these other Mexican Americans were knowledgeable enough about the dynamics and realized that at that time I was probably--and for the twelve years I was on the school board--the Mexican American elected by the largest constituency. It would have taken someone running for governor, attorney general, or the Senate, because it was all of L.A. County, so it vastly exceeded a mayor in Texas, let's say. So José Angel Gutiérrez learned about me and contacted me and got me to go down to Crystal City when he, CSO-like, got people registered to vote, and they got a majority of the city councilmen elected in Crystal City, and a majority of the school board. So schools became a cause, became a cause.

I remember when I was down there we were talking about their taking over the city, because they had not quite done it yet. The biggest employer in Crystal City was Del Monte tomato packing, and to suppress the development of the voting-registration drives in Crystal City, the parent headquarters of Del Monte simply closed down the factory, so ten, fifteen thousand people were suddenly out of work. "We'll teach you to start registering to vote." And José Angel and the young people of his age, about ten years younger than me, but inspired by Roybal and that movement, okay, they simply passed around food, and they survived. And some of them lost

their cars, and so they got rides with neighbors. I mean, they were really gutted economically, because everybody has a car and they're making monthly payments, and if you can't make monthly payments, why, your car is repossessed. And they registered to vote anyway and then took over the city council.

And then I think it was about that time, just before the elections, I went and gave a talk, animando, saying, "We did this in L.A. If we did this in huge L.A., you can do it in Crystal City, because José and the guys have counted the demography. You have enough people here to vote." And, of course, since I was in education, that got them interested in taking over the school board. They took over the school board and immediately inaugurated bilingual education, which was the standard, fly the flag, bilingual education. They were in office maybe ten, twelve years or so, then kind of petered out and they lost, but they planted the flag, and life in Crystal City--Del Monte opened up again. It started running low on cans of tomatoes--and life in Crystal City was different thereafter. And it was different thereafter in many other Mexican American communities in Texas, inspired by Crystal City.

So there were ten to fifteen years where a lot of this activity was blossoming all over. Not so much in Colorado. There weren't enough Mexican Americans there, and Anglo control is tighter. Not so much in Arizona for the same reasons; more activity in New Mexico. So really Texas, New Mexico, and California.

Espino

Well, how did this meeting with Johnson affect political activity and political organization?

Nava

Well, it helped greatly. I call him in writing, in articles, I call him the first Chicano president, the first Chicano president. For

seven years or whatever it was, he had White House Office of Mexican American Affairs with a dozen secretaries and assistants. My God, you know? It was significant. First Chicano president. I don't think he's ever gotten credit for it. There aren't enough Mexican American historians, and especially those that see beyond their immediate locale and see where we fit into the broad picture. But Ford was not interested in us. Nixon was, but not Ford nor anybody after that, so that presidential involvement ended with Johnson and a little bit of Nixon.

Espino

Well, I see how an office like that could be important just symbolically, but practically was it programs, money?

Nava

Oh, yes, there were a lot of things. Sure. Oh, yes, regulations and dissemination of information. Oh, yes. I don't know for sure, but I believe that much more could have been done, because my view being a Californian was that we sent in the White House, could have done much more, because anybody in government would have done what he said, because they knew it was another right next to Johnson. Heaven help someone who would resist what Vicente would suggest. He was smooth. But like Ralph Guzmán, oh, I hadn't thought of him, Ralph Guzmán was very much involved in the CSO movement, my age, my height, similar thinking and feeling. He taught at UCLA for a while. He called us the gentle revolutionaries, and he said, "It's just our situation. We're polite, and in the United States that doesn't go very far, because Anglos are Germanic and English. They're rude. They're violent and vulgar," all of which pretty much apply, huh? Beginning with an LBJ, but fortunately he's on your side. Heaven help you if he isn't.

But Ralph said, "That's one of our handicaps. We ask. Blacks are Anglo. Blacks, they're so white they're bleached. They

demand. 'Give it to me or I'll kill you. Give it to me or I'll burn the city. We demand.'" Like this Reverend [Al] Sharpton and [Reverend] Jesse Jackson, who the hell asked them to always get in front of everything that happens? [Spanish phrase] What for? What have they got to offer, just to be there, okay? And if some newspaper person makes the mistake of asking them a question--they don't do that so much now--they'll give you this speech, "Slavery, blah, blah, blah." So whites sort of cower, "Yes, yes, it's true, but myself, I didn't have any slaves." And Mexican Americans are not that way, and it's a problem, because you have to hope to encounter someone who reacts to reason and to soft thinking, polite thinking, and not to demands.

Espino

You must have seen a change in the late sixties when Chicano students were angry, did have rage.

Nava

Well, yes. Well, they were using black tactics, demands, the ninety-two demands. That was black. But the big difference--not a single paper clip was hurt in any of the schools during the walkouts, and that was the Hispanic part, and that's what Ralph was referring to. We're polite, we are respectful. And I would say, "Yeah, because we have a higher regard for ourselves and therefore we have respect for someone else. And if you don't like yourself, you don't like anybody else either, chances are." But yes, like I said, the parents that left the school-board meeting room immaculate, and no school or property or anybody was hurt. No one ever threw an apple or an orange or a rock at a policeman, which kind of confused them, because at that time blacks weren't acting that way, so what is it with the Mexicans?

And then in time they came to realize, we can deal with Mexicans differently. In time it came out to work in our favor. We were not threatening. Gradually Marías replaced black

maids, and it's the ultimate demonstration of confidence that you will pick María to take care of your children, instead of someone else. And it's not because she works less. It's a problem that she doesn't understand English. But they replaced blacks because they're cordial, kind, gentle, generally, okay. So I remember my mother's remark, "We'll get it back." "How?" "In bed. We'll just out-populate them." And, of course, now I don't know what the figures are for sure. The last time I noticed, about 33 percent of Mexican young people marry outside the group, and if it weren't for the influx of immigrants we would be on our way to disappearance or to blending in.

But it's not possible, because we keep getting new recruits, which is part of the dilemma in education. Schools could handle Mexican American kids, but not when all of a sudden you have a flood, and schools here in Escondido and 65 percent of the kids are English learners. Well, that overwhelms any school. It's not that something is wrong with schools. If anything, it's something that's wrong with the Mexican family, that doesn't appreciate like Jews and Asians do, "You will learn English. You will turn off the television. You have a favorite program? All right, just see the favorite program. Then after that you will do an hour or an hour and a half of homework every night." There's nothing in the world to keep our families from doing that, nothing. So I blame them in the sense that that's where I place the responsibility. The schools, they're simply overwhelmed.

I've had many, many--when I was on the board I would go out of my way to talk to teachers, and I've had some beautiful young Anglo American teachers with practically tears in their eyes saying, "Well, Board Member, you don't know how hard I'm trying. I've done everything, and it's hard because they're just learning English, and they don't seem to see the importance of school." And alongside in a nearby school, Asians are getting A-pluses. All right, are we dumber? I

stopped doing that, but for a while I was saying that in public meetings. "¿Somos más tontos de los judios, los asiaticos? ¿Por qué es que todos ellos van a UCLA y no los nuestros solamente un número muy pequeño? ¿Es que somos mas tontos, más flojos o más ignorantes?" And I got bad reactions, so I stopped. I use a different approach, but every now and then I felt that I had the right to be mad. Maybe some of them said, "Are we dumber?" Maybe that would inspire parents to say, "No, we're not." "Well, get your kid. He loves music? Fine. Maybe he's a potential mathematician." So it's really in the community where the battle must be fought.

It's like I said earlier in one of our earlier talks that I would often say, "Our kids could go to school in a garage, and as long as a teacher is competent, and I think most teachers are competent, they would do a better job when they saw the kids were anxious to learn, que tienen ganas." Like that Bolivian teacher that taught that group of students at Garfield High to score nationally so high. You have to have ganas, and that just about says it. But I have often said [laughs], Rudy [Acuña] got pissed off at me, but he knew how I meant it, I'd say, "Ah, Rudy, we haven't suffered enough." "What do you mean we haven't suffered enough?" "Well, to begin with, we haven't been enslaved." "Yes, we have." [laughs] You could see the discussion. I said, "But we can blend in. Some of us are coffee and some of us are cream, and most of us are coffee and cream. We can get lost. It's how you dress and how you talk and where you live and who you associate with, and people don't really know that you're Mexican." "But we choose to identify as Mexican." I said, "That's what's wrong with the exclusive approach to bilingual education. We identify ourselves and arouse confusion and resentment, if not animosity."

I've had Jewish people say, "Why don't we have bilingual education in Hebrew in schools?" And I'll tell community groups, "Haven't you noticed? After school Japanese kids go to

Japanese school. Jewish kids go to a Jewish school. Just two hours, but they go, and that's where they learn Japanese, and that's where they learn Hebrew and the Torah. And what about us?" "The kids go out to play football." "Fine. But you know what? A couple of hours a day wouldn't hurt them, or they turn on the TV set and they're gone for the rest of the evening." "And they're enjoying life." "Yeah, they are, but if they got through high school they'd probably earn three or four hundred thousand dollars a year in lifetime earnings and they got a college degree." I don't know what the figures are now with inflated dollars, but probably close to five to seven hundred thousand dollars more lifetime earnings, and just not the earnings but what the interest would be earned in the early stages.

Espino

Well, let's go back to your ideas about improving education when you first started on the Board of Education, and then through your experience meeting teachers like you've just described, meeting parents; how did that change or stay the same? So in the beginning, what was your platform? What were some of the things that you would tell people when you were first running?

Nava

Well, first of all, it was a district-wide election, and so someone in Santa Monica or Woodland Hills or Monterey Park had an equal right to my attention, so I would not go to just Mexican-dominated schools. So the themes were general, with some emphasis that was peculiar to our folks you have to say if I went to Sheridan Elementary School or to Bridge Street School or to Hollenbeck. But a very common element was to encourage parental involvement. No matter what the group was, there's been insufficient parental involvement in public schools, and taking college-bound courses even if you didn't end up going to college--it was good to take if not algebra,

which I had a horrible time with, but physics and geometry, these subjects that developed your critical-thinking ability, and mostly staying in school, and citing figures that were accurate at that time as to on the average how much more high school graduates earned than dropouts, and already dropouts was a serious problem in black schools where I went many, many, many, many times, and to Mexican schools. It was never a problem at Asian schools or Jewish schools. There we talked about college-bound stuff and opening classes to the extent of budgetary capability that would help kids get into UCLA, because that's where most of them would aspire to go and not to USC, where you could go with a lower GPA if you could afford the tuition.

And over times they produced as many significant graduates as UCLA, not as many but about as many. They don't have the research capability, for example, that UCLA has. But it was parental involvement and staying in school, those were the big themes, and the parental involvement was with the school and not just simply finding out who your kids' teachers are and finding activities home but would fit in with what the kids were studying. And the responsibility was so vast that you couldn't dictate to a principal as to what to do. You could find out how things are going, compare impressions with the principal, encourage the principals, thank them, because it's a thankless job to a very great extent, and encourage them. It's not the kind of a job where you can come in and change education. It isn't.

Like I would say, "It takes four votes to tango." You have to get another board member who will second your motion and then two others that might agree. So much of the school-board responsibility and activity was extracurricular, so to speak, was going to community groups, visiting colleges, giving talks by invitation in other school districts that were awakening to the fact that schools could do other things to

help Mexican American kids, like that episode up in Wyoming, you remember, where I was invited to go up there--

Espino

Oh, yes, now I remember.

Nava

The cowboys.

Espino

That's right.

Nava

Talks like that all over the place, and more than I can remember. So there was a national projection not because it was me but because people knew that this is a board member from giant L.A. Unified School District, so you were like a prophet in many places, talking about things that they had not heard anyone talk about. It's the importance I placed on writing these books for schools as a multiplier tool, because you couldn't do it all. And I remember telling Pat, "First of all, don't worry, I won't get re-elected." I was re-elected. Then I was away much--I probably guess three of the seven nights a week I was away talking to some group, and I tried to make the home time as valuable as possible for the children, and I don't think they suffered any negative effect of my being on the board. I don't think so, because I did everything possible to correct for that. But it was hard on Pat, because she did not like civic-political life, still doesn't, and so she would say, "Why you're working so hard, I think that you're running for reelection." "Oh, don't worry. I'm telling everybody what I think and it often annoys people, and so don't worry, I don't think I'll get re-elected."

Like one of these themes I made or expressed in community groups was the need for more financial support for the schools. Common complaint that schools cost too much. So there was a

large group in Encino, the west valley, Encino-Woodland Hills and south of the boulevard, like half-acre homes, big homes, nice homes, so I wanted to give a talk there, motherhood and apple pie and then the questions. And then one guy was complaining about property taxes in a very eloquent, brief--I think he was an engineer--brief, concise, and so I said, "I agree with you." He was surprised. "I agree with you, but--," because he made some remark about, "I'm getting ready to send my kids to private schools." So I said, "Oh, thank you for the lead in."

And I said, "Well, I don't know what the private schools around here cost." I really did, because there's about three of them in that part of the valley, and it cost about \$4,000 a semester to send your kid to a private school, a semester. Of course they were fed and it was all very nice and very good teachers, small classes. And I said, "Well," I looked around and said, "in this school, Woodland Hills Elementary," or so, "it's surrounded by homes that probably pay about maybe \$1600 a year in property taxes." And he looked kind of surprised, because I must have come pretty close. And I said, "Now, why do I mention 1600?" I said, "Because the board has a lot of staff, maybe too many, but sometimes even board members think that way, but they check into all kinds of things, and so we know what the property value is in this community, and property taxes are probably 1500, maybe as high as \$1800, depending on whether you have a pool."

And I said, "Well, how much is that a month? And how much is that a week?" And there were some people in the audience who quickly said, "So much, so much." "No, no, no, so much." "How much is that per day? Five days only, remember." And there were no pocket computers yet, but someone came down to it and it was something like, I don't know, maybe ten dollars a day or twelve dollars a day. And this man was still standing, because he was going to get an answer from me, and boy did he get the--I said to him, "Well, you couldn't pay a babysitter

for that much. But I know your school, and you know what? It's a good school. I would almost say it's a damn good school. Do any of us here have any complaints?" So I told him, "Well, property taxes are high, but you know what Mr. So-and-so?" Because by this time I'd got his name. "It's not a bad buy." [growls] And I got that [growls] kind of feeling in much of the audience.

So much of the job was, depending on the constituency, informing and educating the audience to what schools are like, and how much do we pay our teachers. At that time a fully experienced teacher was maybe earning \$30,000. And I told them, "You know, that's not a lot of money for the years it took to get that degree." And I said, "It's not much better than what I earn at Cal State," and I would say, "I'm earning forty-two or forty-five, and that took a Ph.D." I said, "I think I ought to earn twice as much, but forget it, it's not going to happen, is it? Why do I do it?" Someone goes, "Why do you do it?" "Because I love teaching and I love young people, and I'd rather earn a living helping than simply making money. Okay, then that's the way most of your teachers feel, so whenever you think about it, shake your teacher's hand and tell her or him, 'Thank you,' because they deserve it." So that's why I got reelected twice, because I carried those districts, and it was a message beyond Chicanada, and in part that's why I opposed the Chicano thrust or movement to change the city charter to elect school-board members by district, and when that qualified I said, "That's it for me. I don't want to be elected from just the valley, because there'll be no Mexicans in my district to begin with. Sylmar and San Fernando will be part of another district."

As well as being tired. I was tired, because I was really holding down two jobs and it wasn't always appreciated. Activists simply thought that I was on the school board full time, but I think you got \$200 per meeting. [Spanish phrase]

Espino

And then the strain on your marriage, I would imagine.

Nava

It was a strain on the marriage, sure. Yes.

Espino

Well, can you talk to me a little bit about some of the proposals that you might have brought to the board, some of the things that you felt strongly enough to actually have a vote?

Nava

Well, bilingual education, eliminating IQ testing, school community advisory councils, the buying of more books about minority groups, hiring more minority teachers, and that's about it, but all of those were hard to attain. It was a board majority for all of them, but it took time. And then one thing that hurt greatly was the passage of Proposition 13, and that was another factor in my deciding to not run, figuring who needs it? I've done my share, twelve years on the board, and especially since so many of the slightly younger Chicanos said, "Ah, but then we would have two school board members or three school board members." And I said, "Well, maybe, but not necessarily. With the way the districts are, not necessarily. We'll be a minority in all but one or two." And sure enough there was only one elected, and that school board member didn't have the clout that I had had, because the other six board members could say, "Well, thank you very much," and that's it.

And Chicano leaders in this movement to elect school board members--blacks felt the same way, too, that is black activists. Not all of them but most of them, enough of them to carry the day--farsighted black leaders felt like I did. No, it's better to have a piece of seven board members than all of one, and that was the argument I made. Right now every board member has to pay attention to the Hispanic vote, but not if

there's only one elected from a Mexican district. "No, no, we're going to have two if not three." It's never worked out that way, although now I think there are two, and that's because of the change in demography in the city. No one predicted that at that time.

But so those were the main themes, and at the same time I was teaching full time at the campus, helping--I didn't help much with Chicano Studies, because they got their own staff and were doing their own things and under excellent leadership, because again, Rudy was chairman every now and then, but they had one-year jobs. They avoided the building in of an empire.

Espino

Do you think that bilingual education was the most difficult, or were some of the other issues?

Nava

Yes, it was the most difficult, but I never thought it was fundamental to improving the development of our talent. No. What was more important was learning English so that you could read the chemistry textbooks and your biological textbooks and your history and whatever, because the world was in English, and then Spanish, yes, as a form of enrichment and cultural pride, but not as a fundamental thing. And it became nonetheless a rallying cry for the post-G.I.-generation scholars, Chicano scholars and activists, and that carried it all the way to Sacramento and all the way across the country, arousing considerable hostility, which I thought put a brake on development of other things that were more important, because like I always come back saying, "The Chinese, the Japanese, and the Jews teach their kids after school, and they don't make demands upon school districts that arouse animosity," like bilingual education did. "This is not Mexico. Who in the hell do you think you are?"

And the Mexico-U.S. relationship was always a special one that had to be dealt with, because Japan and China were far away and so was Israel, and so the fear of Mexico, especially as immigration started to increase, giving rise to fear, "They're taking over. They want to make this a bilingual country. Who do they think they are?" And once that argument develops then you have diminished communication about books, teacher preparation, homework and all of the rest, because now you have resentment.

Espino

Were you on the board when Chinese became part of the discussion in bilingual education?

Nava

Yes.

Espino

So it wasn't just Spanish initially? Well, initially it might have been, and then--

Nava

No, initially it was Spanish, but then later on Chinese also. Chinese Americans wanted the same thing and some of that was done, but the Chinese were all in a very small area, and so it was easy. Their schools there were 80 percent Chinese, and again, the Chinese were polite about it, not demanding, and the ice had been broken already regarding Spanish, so it was easier for them. The question for them would be books and teachers, which made it very difficult, because no significant number of Chinese went into teaching. They went into business, and Jews likewise, business and professions. That's where the money is, that's where you can take care of yourself more effectively in this society, and Mexican Americans are just, "How are the Dodgers doing?" You see, and not enough--it was very hard to get them aroused, and some of that took place because of different groups.

Like the Association of Mexican American Educators and the development of MASA, Mexican American Student Association, and then what was the other group that's become more powerful on campus is MECHA, and those helped, but, of course, they helped mostly with students who are already enrolled, although they also had a lot of community outreach, to their credit. But community outreach is, I think, very, very valuable all the way back into junior high school. Elementary, they don't have their head together yet, but junior high school along with puberty, and all of those issues are here today, all of them, and dealing with them is harder by virtue of the numbers. Gosh, when I was elected, as I said earlier, we had two Mexican American principals, Bill Zazueta, who was out of it, and Elario de la Pena at Roosevelt, one or two elementary school women teachers, maybe one of them was a guy, and now there must be 150 of them at all levels. Well, that's all part of the process, and then knowing that the district welcomes them, recruits them.

Espino

Did you actually visit schools when you were on the board?

Nava

Which schools?

Espino

Any schools within your area?

Nava

You mean public schools?

Espino

Yes, did you actually go to visit them and meet students?

Nava

Oh, a lot of them, oh, yes, a lot of them, and talked to the students and encouraged them to express their view on, "What

do you want to do when you grow up?" By now, of course, we had reached the Moon. "What about being an astronaut? Why not? The pay's very good." "Yeah, but it's very dangerous." "Yeah, it's very, very dangerous. It's also very dangerous to get on the freeway," and just getting the kids involved and thinking about, "You can be anything you want. You could be just about anything you want, so what do you want to be?" Oh, a lot of that, within limits because I had a full load at the campus. See, that was always there, and working hard to get promoted to associate, which was a big step. It is on most campuses, but then to get full another four or five years. [clock strikes] What time is it?

Espino

Noon.

Nava

Twelve o'clock.

Espino

Yes, it's been an hour and a half.

Nava

But, yes, a lot of school visits, as many as I could make, and the school visits that I preferred to go to were the Mexican American schools, because I figured the Chinese, the Anglo, and the Jewish-dominated schools, they'll take care of themselves, so I went if I was invited. And in the other schools I sought opportunities to talk, fifteen minutes in an aud call, an auditorium call, or to some--because by now many of the schools had developed separate groups for leaders, student council and so forth.

Espino

Do you recall the condition that you found the schools in when you would visit them?

Nava

They were fine, fine, very well kept. In fact, most of them were very well kept, because they were brand new. We were building a new elementary school about once--they were getting finished about every five months, because the city population was growing enormously, so we were in a tremendous building boom, and so most of the schools were brand new, and many of them had--I would almost dare say most of them had modern conveniences like intercoms where the principal could call in or the teacher call out, and audiovisual materials, nothing to complain about regarding physical condition of the schools. Yes, some of the schools needed paint inside or outside, because when Prop. 13 came in, then schools physically started to deteriorate, not in ways that affected education but in appearance, because before that I remember clearly that we had a cycle to paint the outside of schools every eight years and paint the inside of a school every whatever the years were.

Well, we simply stretched it, so the outside of schools will be painted every twelve years, the inside of the schools as needed, so a lot of them were faded and maybe some chips here and there, and so some people rightfully complained, but it was because the budget for maintenance had to be reduced. The board made very wise policy. We can hire fifteen more teachers by increasing the cycle for painting the schools, so those were the kinds of choices that were forced on us, like we have today. But the physical conditions of schools were not an issue, although there were some problems, but they were not significant.

Espino

In 1963 then, Crawford v. Board of Education--

Nava

Yes, sure.

Espino

But that was before you were even on the board. But it seemed to have taken a long time before busing was actually implemented. Do you remember any of those discussions?

Nava

Oh, yes, oh, yes. And finally there were lawsuits by blacks for implementing integration, and Reverend [Bill] Jones and I had many intelligent conversations about it, about the mixed feelings of integration, because among other things one of the reforms that Bill Jones and I and the board majority had enacted was the School Community Advisory Councils, which for the first time gave the community influence, not power but influence in the curriculum and in the conduct of life at their school, and integration would scatter the kids, and so black parents or Mexican American parents are not about to follow their children to Santa Monica or San Pedro or Chatsworth to meet the Community Advisory Council. They just are not going to do it. And so that undercut, weakened the community advisory councils and also weakened the influence of these two ethnic groups on the administration of their local school, because the goal of Crawford v. the Board of Education was that school demography in so far as it was feasible should reflect the demography of the district.

So you were going to have to have, say, Mexican Americans were 25 percent of the student body, 25 percent of Mexican American kids all over the city, all over the district, requiring several thousand brand-new buses to bus the kids, and with the busing issue you had the rise of middle-class white opposition to the board and to education. They were not about to have their kids sent out to South L.A. to those schools, that kind of feeling. And so in the next board elections we lost the board majority, and Bus Stop, the group that ran board members, elected two board members to the board, which then comprised a new majority. And [Bobbie] Fiedler was the

woman, and [Richard] Ferraro was the man, a fat Italian, dumb as hell, but shrewd. How can those both things be true? A graduate of [U]SC, of which he was very proud. But he would talk for about three minutes and I would ask myself, "What did he say? What did he say?"

And Bobbie Fiedler, she was articulate, and she was Jewish, white, middle-class and out to stop the buses, and very, very intelligent though. We had a number of delightful, intense, acrimonious differences of opinion, but with Ferraro, what did he say? But then I felt that way about the black school-board member [Diane] Watson that replaced Jim [Bill?] Jones, Diane Watson. We came to be mortal political foes. She's the one who cost me the presidency at Cal State L.A. Diane would speak at greater length. She would speak for five minutes, and she would lose track of what her point was, and a couple of times I insulted her; I didn't do it again. "Diane, just what are you trying to communicate?" "What do you mean?" And the board members would just smile. But she had a mind that went on and on and on and on from one thing to another. In a little sentence she would change and a different predicate would come out. But she replaced Jim Jones, so she and I had joint horrible fights with the anti-busing majority on the school board.

But on one of those occasions I was board president, when the judge, Gittleston, Judge Gittleston finally made [a fateful order.] I came up with a compromise which the board majority accepted, and that included Ferraro and Fiedler, and that was a voluntary integration program where the school district would promise to pay the expenses of transportation for any children that wanted to go to an integrated environment, because many blacks would want that and many Chicanos would, too. But the judge said, "There's no assurance that this would come to the parameters, the representative ethnicity," so he voted that down, and then he simply sent out an order saying, "The school district in the next semester will integrate

schools according to the court order, and if it is unwilling or unable to, the court then will appoint a manager." I think that was the term. In other words, take over the school district.

And the school board was scared to death, and so the whole board went to Boston for, I think, three days, to meet with a school board there and teachers and administrators, because a judge had taken over the Boston School District, and it was a mess for a number of different reasons, but public community resistance to begin with. And there was fighting and there was destruction of school property, and there were some people badly injured, fights in the community. The Irish there are a very special group. That cop that arrested Professor Gates? He was an Irish cop. Anyway, the Irish are a very special group, and they weren't about to have black kids coming into their schools, and the school board tried in vain. I lost track of what happened, but our school board came back and then in what's called executive sessions, where the public is not invited to appear and no records are kept, because state law permits that whenever you're discussing personnel issues or legal issues. Anything else has got to be public. There's a famous law called the Field Act, and you couldn't talk about something you should talk about in public in a board executive session, because one of the seven would say, "Stop," and he would start to complain.

But we could talk about Boston in executive session, and we agreed, we don't want to have Judge Gittleson take over our school district. It need not be like Boston, but it could very well be like Boston. So I was the board president at the time, towards the end of my term, and so I said, "Okay, we're going to integrate following the judge's guidelines," which cost me a lot of popularity as far as that goes, and the school board as well. But the answer was, "We do it or the court will try to do it." And so we proceeded to integrate L.A. Unified School District, buying--by now the bus-making companies had been tooling up, and they had about 3,000 buses ready with the

L.A. labels on them, to make available to us with drivers. And the first day I remember, with the help of the police department, the first day of integration I got a helicopter ride and rode over L.A., and on the freeways you could just see lines of buses. They were traveling at freeway speed, about forty-five, fifty miles an hour, but just lines of buses and then buses coming in the other direction at school time in the morning and in the afternoon, so this was, I think, in the afternoon about three o'clock, thousands of buses on the San Diego Freeway, Santa Monica as well. So we started to integrate L.A. Unified School District, which happened largely after I left, the beginning and then after I left.

And now in the meantime back at the rancho, Mexican Americans are just taking over demographically, so no one talks about integration anymore, and it proved to be of such limited benefit, limited, some, yes, but limited, that it didn't seem to be all that the integrationists had hoped it would be, and so they cooled down or diminished their efforts to insist, and so integration has simply died on the vine. Proponents just said, "There are other ways to go about it." Yes, so those were twelve tumultuous years that had some repercussions statewide, because there were many talks in other school districts by invitation where not just me but other school-board members talked about the dilemma, and mostly Jim Jones and I and then Diane Watson and I were invited to give talks as representatives of the minority groups primarily involved.

And I remember echoing my personal feelings. "We integrated because we were ordered to. We would have preferred to do it voluntarily, even if it was not as complete as proponents for integration would have liked." This was in Modesto, Bakersfield, caramba you know, Stockton, just as relevant as Los Angeles, San Francisco, good lord.

Espino

So you and Diane Watson were on the same page on that one point?

Nava

Yes, for two years. Yes, we were on the same page.

Espino

And she would primarily speak to the African American community, while you would speak primarily to the Mexican American?

Nava

Yes, primarily. Now, I don't know whether it was 60/40, 70/30, but that's why we were elected, and both of us had that feeling of responsibility to our group.

Espino

Did you have any other philosophical or pedagogical issues with busing?

Nava

No. We knew that it would have a drastic negative effect on curriculum, because part of the integration ethos, thinking, was to have black history, to have Chicano history, all of which is to the good, but very few teachers were competent to do that. Just the social environment in schools, the black kids during play time would go off and play over there, everybody else over here, to a great extent the Chicanos students also, but again, being white and being coffee and cream, some more coffee and some with more cream as I like to say, more of the kids could integrate and get lost, and they didn't have that negative feeling of being Mexican, like blacks had for being black, which was always and still is a big stumbling block.

When blacks, my impression is, act like a human being ordinarily, fine, what's the problem? But then I may not be typical, because I've lived in Latin America where you're

surrounded by Indians or surrounded by blacks, like in the Caribbean and in Colombia, no, Venezuela. So you just look beyond the blackness and they do, too. So it's a pretty much straightforward relationship, which is harder to attain here, because they have a chip on their shoulder, understandably. Racism in Latin America is there, but it's more polite. But if a black couple can afford to go to a country club, they get in. People are not going to move away from their table. Racism-- you won't intermarry and move in different social groups, but black-white relations in the United States are peculiar to the United States.

But integration I think was harmful in the main, because as I said, you needed a feeling of camaraderie. "This is our school and this is what we're going to do, be it black or brown or Asian." And when the kids were scattered all over, se acabo? Send the kids off to school, "Where are you going?" "Canoga Park." "¿Dónde queda eso?"

Espino

And you knew this at the time? What you're stating now isn't in hindsight, it's something--

Nava

It's not in retrospect. I saw it. This is what's going to happen, this is what is happening, and yet all along there are benefits, but they are not as great in impact as the negatives. So we lost many teachers who quit and went to teach in other school districts that did not face the integration issue, or many teachers that asked for transfers. In other words, there was a lot of this. But all the time, all the time there are more and more Hispanics getting through SC and UCLA, and I've always had a soft spot in my heart for USC because it accepted almost as if it were a junior college many students that didn't have a ghost of getting into UCLA. UCLA was the aristocrats, with professors coming from all over the country and all over the world, and they didn't understand this issue and could care

less. "I'm Norwegian, I made it. What's the matter with you?" You see? A fair question, but not completely. And USC through loans and scholarships and more flexible acceptance requirements produced a significant part of the generation of new teachers, as well as the state universities.

Espino

Well, just I'm a little curious. How do you know that? How do you know that USC accepted these kinds of students?

Nava

Because I got to know many of the students. I got to know many of the students. For example, a group of Mexican American students, G.I. generation, that had gone through SC on the G.I. Bill, told me, because I tried to circulate out everywhere, and again because your job was countywide, you couldn't help but to meet people. One group formed a scholarship association at SC, and they talked the president of SC, whose name will come back, they said, "Mr. President, we are the this, that, and the other." "Oh, really?" He didn't know the group existed. "Well, that's great. You're raising funds for more students to come to SC; that's great. How much have you raised?" "Oh, we raised \$15,000 this last year." "Really? That's a nice amount." "Yeah, we had our big banquet at this, that, and the other place, and we're going to get ready for the next one, and here we came to ask you to match the funds that we raise for Mexican American scholarships for SC." "Really! Well, I'll be darned. Let me think about it and let me get back to you." They met again, the guys told me. Who were they? Sixty years ago, I shouldn't feel embarrassed that I don't remember. "Okay, okay, it's a deal. No, we don't have to put it in writing. It's a deal. We, USC, will match the money you make for Mexican American scholarships into a special fund. The university will administer it, of course, but you guys will be involved in it."

And so this guy retired, this president retired and about a year later a new president came in, and the group went to talk to the new president about the arrangement made with the outgoing president, and to his credit the new president said, "Okay." And the next fundraising session the guys raised close to \$30,000, because they had this incentive, matching funds, and SC gulped but matched it. Then the next season, the next year they raised I think more like 45,000, and I think they've kind of topped off at about \$50,000 to \$60,000 annually. The reason I know this is that I was invited with about six other, quote, unquote, "prominent Mexican American leaders in education" to one of their fundraising meetings at SC, and it wasn't the big fundraiser, but it was a meeting at SC. The Town and Gown, that's what it's called, the Town and Gown. It wasn't fundraising, it was a commemoration or something. And so talking to some of the guys at the table this story came up. I'd heard it before, but it came up again, and I was at the table with the guy who is still the executive director of the big museum over there on Sunset Boulevard, what is it, up on the hill, the Getty Museum. He's a director of the Getty Museum, and he was a graduate of Roosevelt High School and a graduate of SC, and so there were people like that that were there.

By now I was kind of burned out, but my memory is they asked me to be there. I guess when they look at it, it was significant, the first Mexican American on the school board in L.A., then later on the ambassadorship. But the Mexican American students at SC have had a resounding success in raising scholarship funds, and now there is a sizable number [attending]. Demographically, they probably exceed the number at UCLA, demographically if not in total, because UCLA is so very big. But UCLA is hard to get into, no matter if you have the scholarship, but SC brings these people together, because SC has been known since time immemorial--UCLA has the brainpower, but SC graduates run the state. Have you heard that before? Oh, it's true. They run the state, and they'll

let UCLA get all the Nobels and all that kind of business. The SC graduates run the state, law, administration, politics, and so SC sets out to find future leaders and educates them and pays for it, and sure enough some of the speakers there are all prominent attorneys and businessmen. And they're all SC graduates that would not have gotten into UCLA, you see. Oh, yes, SC runs the state.

Espino

That's interesting.

Nava

Stanford also, but SC more. They really do that. [clock strikes] It's either twelve-thirty or one o'clock.

Espino

Yes, it's twelve-thirty. So would you like to take a break or how are you doing?

Nava

Yes, we could take a break. We have more to talk about, so--

Espino

I'd like to ask you about MALDEF, the Mexican American Legal and Educational Defense Fund. Have you had any experience with them while on the board or after?

Nava

Yes, sure. Well, one thing we can do if we want to--this depends on your schedule--we can go over here and have a sandwich at the Lake Wolford Cafe.

Espino

Okay, we're back. I just wanted to get back to the question that I asked you before we paused, and that is what your experience was with the Mexican American Legal and Educational Defense Fund, since your second job, I guess, was

as an educator and almost like a public spokesperson for educational issues relating to Mexican Americans.

Nava

Yes, yes. That was a substantial part of the, let's call it the job, and I think that was true for Reverend Jones and also for Diane Watson, but the need was more desperate for our group, because we were farther behind in that kind of political organization. Blacks were more sophisticated. Like I would tell Rudy sometimes, "They've been beat up longer, like Jews, and they figured out how to infiltrate the system and gain control of the system, become part of it, use it." And MALDEF is what I would call a second-generation group that fed on the G.I. generation and the successes that it had, encouraged by LBJ's White House encouragement of this kind of activity. That kind of sanction or encouragement can and did have widespread effects that were not always immediately apparent but were there. People started talking about education, and inspired by the black Civil Rights Movement to a great extent, MALDEF concentrated on legal matters and less on education, because legal matters were so important.

And so the group gradually grew, because by that time, the seventies and the eighties, there were enough Mexican American men and women in law that they could man the group and develop skills in fundraising. So MALDEF, I had less to do with it than one might guess, because I realized it was chiefly legal issues, integration, civil rights and so forth, and the education group, mindful of the thrust of MALDEF, that I became involved in was the National Hispanic Scholarship Fund, which is now simply called the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, I think. But Rudy wasn't involved in this, because he was busy doing other things. But Ed Moreno, who is a thinker, came up with the idea in one of our regular talks--we got together, because he lived in Canoga Park and I lived in Northridge, which is just a stone's throw--about the need for something equivalent to the Negro College Fund.

And both of us knew already that there were by that time about 105 black Negro colleges, institutes for this, that, or the other, law schools and so forth, but mostly college-oriented, and that they had rather generous subsidies from white state legislatures and even from Congress. It's a little-known secret that they don't publicize even now, and they produced thousands of black professionals, mostly, I think it's fair to say, from second-rate colleges and universities that accepted pupils that would not get accepted into white universities in the South at all for a long, long, time, and after that with great difficulty. So I remember clearly that when I was on the school board Texas opened up a state school of law for blacks, because blacks were getting very uppity and were gaining success in courts to open up attendance rights in the otherwise all-white law schools in Texas, of which there must have been about half a dozen, two or three big ones, okay, San Antonio, Austin, and so forth, Houston.

And so they said, "All right, let's establish a separate-but-equal law school," and they did, with high-paid staff, facilities, libraries, the whole thing. But that in the broad scheme of things did not satisfy the integrationist movement, but it was an example of the extent to which southern states would go to stop or reduce attendance of minorities, which for them were blacks. So there were scores and scores and scores of black institutions generously supported and producing, grinding out graduates every year, and so some of us said--oh, some Mexican Americans wanted to establish Chicano institutions of higher education, and I lost many friendships at their end, because I could live with a difference of opinion, but some of them could not. They were absolutist in their approach. They wanted Chicano universities, and they pointed to the black ones.

So my argument was, "Uh-uh. We'll never get the money," and not all of them were professors that were arguing for this. "You've got to appreciate how long it takes to establish a

library and how hard it is to get good staff. Even if they want a job, they won't go anywhere, and many, many books that a library should have are simply no longer available. Books are out of print. And there are regional and national accrediting associations that must be satisfied that you have what it takes to then say, "All right, we will accredit your university, and your graduates will have a valid driver's license. Otherwise you're dooming students to get a degree that will not be accepted." And so, "Oh, you're a defeatist, you're an elitist. You went to Harvard." I had to suffer with that every now and then, and, "Yeah, you went to Pomona. How in the hell did you get to Pomona? And we can do it, we can do it."

So an effort was made in Texas, and an effort has been made, and I think it still operates up in northern California, for a Mexican American university, and they've never amounted to anything, okay? And the one in Texas was housed in a large two-story nearly abandoned home. Someone just moved out, so they made the bedrooms into classes, and [Spanish phrase]. But they had the name for it, I forget what the name of it was, and there's another one in California, and everything I feared proved to be true. It's virtually impossible. But my argument was, "No. Gringos already fund good public universities. Let's get our kids into those and take advantage of what already exists, rather than starting from scratch in an ill-fated effort. So whatever our attendance is at Cal State L.A., let's try to double it. Whatever it is at UCLA, let's try to increase it," and so forth.

But Ed and I said, "But what we do need is money." So we learned that there was a group in Texas that was also trying to form a group that would be like the American Negro College Fund--is that what it's called? I think it's called the American Negro College Fund, but at that time it had a budget of twenty or thirty million dollars, those dollars, okay, four times that much today. And we also heard that there was a group of Puerto Riquenos that were thinking likewise and a group of

Cubans that were thinking likewise, and so we said, "Oh, shit. We've got to get together." And I don't remember now, but we got in touch with leaders of those other groups, the Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and then the Mexican Americans, which were Ed and me. But we vied for influence with the group in Texas, okay, so the Mexicans were Texans and Californians, and the groups from Texas suggested and we agreed to have--then he was Bishop Flores--a Texan, neutral, to convene the group, and we met in Denver about three or four months later.

And all of this was made possible because I was on the school board. I could get tickets to go wherever I wanted to go with board permission, but there was always approval. So we met in Denver two days, I think, and we agreed to get together and to call the group the National Hispanic Scholarship Fund, and that whatever funds were brought in would be distributed to needy college students from each of the groups in proportion to the population that group represented. So Mexican Americans would get half or two-thirds of the money, ultimately. But this bought in the Cubans, it bought in the Puerto Ricans, and it bought in the Texans and the Californians.

So we had a bright, young Jewish attorney--I don't know how he got involved, but I am convinced from just osmosis that American Jews keep track of everything that goes on that ultimately might affect them, and send out volunteers to help in order to be involved, okay? Fine. Well, this bright, young guy helped us incorporate, and the first year I think we only raised maybe ten, twelve thousand dollars. We thought, it's a good beginning, and I don't remember how it happened but--oh, it happened while I was away, that someone--I would have argued for a rotating chair among the groups, but instead I think the compromise they elected was to pick someone and give him a five-year contract or whatever it was.

But Father Flores was always there to begin everything with a prayer and so forth, and it was very Catholic-oriented, and I

argued that we really should be aggressive, and I said, "We should have a budget of forty, fifty, if not more millions of dollars annually." [imitates gasp] "How do you do that?" I said, "Well, you just turn the screws on Ford and General Motors and Chrysler, because a lot of Mexicans and Latinos buy cars, and all these groups do is to go to a local fundraising session wherever the dealer is, and they buy a \$500 ticket or an \$800 table, and they've done their bit. But blacks go and get \$50,000 from them, and they get it by demanding it and by threatening boycotts if they don't help." So I said, "We've got to roll up our sleeves, because the need is desperate, and we've got to play hardball with major corporations and banks." I said, "Think of the Bank of America and how much they make on our deposits, and same with all the other major banks." And I said, "They all go to the big fundraisers and they contribute heavily."

And I think that Father Flores didn't like brash bare-knuckled-Protestant Julian, and so I was not successful in getting them to do anything which I would have thought would be truly productive. And then my term on the school board ended, and I was appointed ambassador, and I don't know whether someone suggested it or whether I did, to leave the board. But the point is that when I came back from the ambassadorship, I called the director, Ernie Flores, to inquire about possibly getting on the board again, and I could never get through to him. It was always the secretary, "Leave a message." In other words, "We're not interested." Okay, with one of the founders of the group, and by that time I had other things to do, so I said, "Oh, the hell with it." But that's poor gratitude or ingratitude for one of the very founders of the National Hispanic Scholarship Fund.

Well, in time as one can expect, it just gradually started getting more money. It's had one or two women directors after Ernie retired, and now it's a major player, because the [Bill and Melinda] Gates Foundation appropriated, I don't know,

something like 50 or 100 million dollars to education, and somehow by now the national Hispanic group got its oar in the water, and I think they got close to half as much money as the National Negro College Fund. So they dropped the national and they're simply called the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, headquartered in San Francisco. They now had many, many millions of dollars annually to give to scholarships, and they remembered that I had the role I had and gave a generous grant to each of my twin daughters [Carmen and Katie Nava] when they going to college. I think each one of them got about \$10,000. And now I get an annual report. They've never asked me to speak at one of their meetings. You know? They've never asked me. That's a little espina I have. How come? You know how this thing got started. You have other people come and speak, because they send out notices, "Come to speak. It'll only cost you \$300."

Anyway, they have more money than there are Mexican American student applicants for, and so they're sending out calls even, "Please refer students." And so now as I every now and then talk to junior high school or high school groups, Mexican American groups locally, I tell them, "Please don't think that money is an obstacle to going to college." And I tell them, "Call the Hispanic Scholarship Fund. Sometimes I have the address or phone number," I say, "but look it up, and if you don't look it up, the heck with you. And get yourself a \$15,000 or \$20,000 scholarship, because that's the kind of money they have available." And they have to give money away, so financial need is no longer an issue for Mexican American students or Puerto Riquenos or Cuban Americans and Texans, another nationality. [laughs] And so that was one of the very satisfying things that I was able to play a leading role in. It wasn't just me alone, but among a half a dozen guys that got their act together instead of competing with each other, and it's off and going. So now the annual report is glossy and first-rate, first-rate. You don't have to be able to do it yourself, you just hire someone who will do it.

And so as I look down the road, we will have a substantial number of Mexican American professionals going through the mill, because money is no longer a problem thanks to [Bill] Gates' and his wife Melinda's foresight. But you still have all the Negro colleges, and so our kids still have to compete to get into Berkeley and UCLA or state universities. If you're really stuck and hard up, you can go to one of the Negro colleges, and your M.A. is still an M.A., because it's an accredited institution and so forth. So we've been in a unequal race if you look at it as a race or a competition, for available funding and available slots. Blacks still have--now, there has been, it's true, pressure the last ten years or so in Congress, mind you, to require these black institutions to admit whites, and so they have now started to admit whites in order to escape the segregated status, but they're simply open, and a limited number of whites want to go to an all-black institution, because if you can do it, you go to a school where you think your degree is worth more than East Tennessee College of Education or whatever it is. You'll want to go to University of Tennessee and so forth. But you do have whites going to those colleges, which maintains their special funding in Congress that is never identified in the public news, but it's many, many millions of dollars.

And so Bill Gates came along just in time, so to speak, because black students that graduate from those institutions, they get teaching jobs everywhere. They get appointed here and there and the other, and it creates a bureaucracy of that group, and many of them do well. It's no surprise. And so they become part of the establishment. So you have every time there's some federal appointment or job to be gotten, if it isn't white it's black. You notice? I have, especially under [President Barack] Obama. Where are the Hispanics? I made that suggestion politely to Hilda Solis, because she is in the Cabinet. She can pull the president aside. A congressman can't. Not even a senator can, but a member of his Cabinet

can. So I said, "Where is the equivalent leadership that corresponds to our demography?"

So it's a constant struggle, and blacks don't make room for you. They get in there, and I can understand it, but it's not smart to begrudge it. But I think we're more open-minded and fair as a group. But Obama has been very prominent in the appointment of blacks. Well, compensation makes sense, but Hispanics are there also. Granted, he appointed [Sonia] Sotomayor to the [U.S.] Supreme Court, and that's a biggie, but she's Puerto Rican. And I love Puerto Ricans, but she's not Mexican American, and we need role models. Now, the name by itself has a role-model function, but it's not the same thing, because everybody knows she's Puerto Rican, and Puerto Ricans have done well as a group. I enjoyed the two years I was there. I almost got married twice. It didn't happen, but every now and then when I get mad at Pat, "I should have married Anita." But I'm sure you have feelings like that every now and then.

Espino

That's funny. So then just getting back to the scholarship fund, you weren't just focusing on Mexican Americans. You were focusing on all Latinos, and this was before the eighties, I'm assuming, before Hispanic really became a popular term. How did you come to--

Nava

Well, Ed and I, for example, argued for Hispanic instead of Mexican American and Latino, and I remember--what was that very prominent editorial writer who became an editor in the L.A. Times and died at his desk?

Espino

Frank del Olmo?

Nava

Frank del Olmo, yes. I had a personal relationship with Frank, because he had a disadvantaged child, and I had a sister who had a disadvantaged child, and they went together to special schools. We didn't talk very long about it, but I preferred Hispanic rather than Latino, and, "That takes too long to say." "His-pan-ic, La-ti-no, no it doesn't." And so I said, "You're still suffering from the black legend or the prejudice from Northern Europe against everything Spanish and the conquest." I said, "Why didn't you like Latino? It sounds nicer." "Yeah, come to think of it, it does sound nicer. Latino sounds nicer than Hispanic. But Latino," I told del Olmo, I said, "it includes the French, the Portuguese, the Italians and the Brazilians, whereas Hispanic is very specific, Spanish surname. I've got nothing against Brazil. Some of my best friends are Brazilians, and the same is true for the other Latins, but if we want to identify, Hispanic is a term to use."

And so I've been watching it in the media every now and then, and in Congress Sotomayor has been referred to as Hispanic. I said, "Good. I'm winning," with due reference to the memory of Frank del Olmo. How sad just to keel over on his desk.

Espino

He was part of this National Hispanic Scholarship Fund program?

Nava

Who?

Espino

Frank del Olmo?

Nava

No.

Espino

Or you just went back and forth about the term?

Nava

Yes, about the term, yes. And as far as that goes, I don't object to using the word Latino. Academically I'm aware of the fact that it includes all the other groups. But there's a tremendous progress in mostly the business development among Hispanics, the "Hispanic Business Review" or whatever it's called, I think I have a copy of it over there. The number of multi-million-dollar Hispanic firms, the number of foundations--there must be fifty if not seventy-five foundations, and some of them have beau coups dinero. They have a lot of money, so we're just a quantum leap ahead of the 1960s and the 1970s, when we were just getting started, and these professionals are women as well as men. So we're off and running I would say.

But as long as we have immigration, we have to keep pushing as if it were the 1960s, because there's a new crop and it takes a couple of generations before they become Julians and Eddies and Rudys, and what accounted for that stage in our development was the World War experience where everybody went in and where the war was, quote, unquote, "popular," unlike the Korean War, which was not popular, and certainly the Vietnam War, which was so unpopular. Those two wars did not give the push that World War II did. Who remembers or cares about veterans of those two later wars? Or now the Middle East? But the Second World War was a crusade, a global crusade. And even if there were another war, we already have the base of Hispanic leadership and the number of students going into schools, but the work has yet to be done.

Like I go over and give talks--I'm due to give another talk at a school in Vista nearby, where they have set aside, pull aside--they have Mexican boys pulled aside to have classes just for them, and I think they do that for the girls, too, just one class meeting let's say twice a week for an hour. And so this guy's name is David Prieto, Mexican American teacher, because I've gotten into the network here, too--asked me to go in and give

a talk, an inspirational talk, because the kids are all Mexican kids, junior high, and that's when they're beginning to wake up to things, but they're starting from scratch. Now, all of them speak English though. They're all English speakers, but they're still very Mexican, they still very Mexican.

But I go to a fair number of these, but not as many as I am invited to, because I've gotten tired and they don't pay you, and so by the time you go to Oceanside or somewhere, why, it means you have to haul over there, have dinner out by yourself, and then meet with the class and get in the car and come home and use up five hours in the evening. So, you know, thank you but I've been there and I've done that. But closer here in the town, that's different. But the need persists.

Espino

That's a really interesting point about the wave of immigration that continues, or just the influx of new immigrants from Mexico and Central America now, keeps the issues pretty much similar to what you were experiencing--

Nava

Maintains the agenda.

Espino

--in the sixties and in the seventies, and the same needs exist.

Nava

There's more understanding on the part of others--

Espino

That's true.

Nava

--and there is an infrastructure, which I think could do more. One of my big, well, it's a complaint, that both Protestant and especially Catholic churches aren't doing hardly anything.

They're getting you ready for life eternal, and hence I keep reminding myself that our Presbyterian upbringing was so very, very different, because the thinking was different. And now the Catholic churches do virtually nothing. It's not surprising in a way, because the priests aren't local. The priests come from Portugal, they come from Spain, they come from Italy. It's hard to recruit or to encourage the priesthood in most of Latin America, so the priests have to be imported, and they're not tuned into the dynamics of, "Make sure you get out and vote," like black ministers are. Black churches are political institutions; ours are not. Now, one can argue whether they ought to be, but I think they should do a lot more than they do to help with these civic concerns of the congregation.

Espino

Do you think you saw more of that in the forties and fifties than you do now? Or do you think it's always been that way?

Nava

I think so. I think you saw a little bit more, because the needs were more desperate. And then, of course, the relocation was still burning in the minds of many people that didn't go, and we'll never know what happened. I don't think anybody has made a study of what happened to those who did return to Mexico. They just got lost in the shuffle, but several hundred thousand, maybe 150,000 or 200,000 were relocated with their American kids, and I don't know whether they were sophisticated enough to--or had the money--to get a passport for their kids. See what a difference that could make later on, their passport. They can just come back if they wanted to, just cross the border. The picture's old? Well, get a new picture.

Espino

Well, I think probably just the influence of the Presbyterian and the Catholic church probably was huge during the depression years, but again in the sixties and the seventies it

seemed like there was another kind of resurgence of involvement, because you had that organization Católicos Por La Raza, and then you had Tony Rios, who was Presbyterian, correct? No, Hernandez, Tony Hernandez--

Nava

Tony Hernandez, yes.

Espino

--who was very active.

Nava

But he was Presbyterian.

Espino

Presbyterian. And then the Methodists.

Nava

There was the rise of that kind of concern among Catholics, and my impression, my limited impression is that it was young people who independent of their local parish did it. Católicos Por La Raza, okay? But it wasn't because there was a priest out in front. By the same token, César Chávez, who was Catholic, did a great job in involving the clergy, so there were clergy in the marches, always clergy in the marches. And when he died, his memorial service in the valley--have I ever showed you that picture where I'm carrying the coffin? Okay. There was an archbishop that was there. He later on became Cardinal McIntyre, but he was an archbishop, and the Kennedys were there, not Bob [Kennedy], he had been assassinated, but his wife Ethel [Kennedy], and two or three of the Kennedys were there and very prominently Roman Catholic.

So there was a surge and an involvement of the Catholic Church, and I haven't kept track of it, but it wouldn't surprise me if that is true now, because many people in the church are

concerned with the fact that it's dying. It's just the very young children and the older parents that are going to Mass. It isn't the middle-aged people. Why? Because it's not relevant. And I don't know how they're doing financially, but Ernesto [Vera] tells me in Spain if it wasn't for subsidies from the government, the Catholic Church in Spain would just have to close the doors because they haven't paid the light bill. I mean, because it's not relevant. It left such a bad taste after its kinship with fascism with Franco and in Latin America with dictators. They've really figured wrong. Ernesto says this current pope is just a disaster, and in Spain they keep closer track of papal affairs than we do. He says he's a disaster, he's just going to run the church into the ground, which with Ernesto is fine. [laughs] But he said that's what's happening.

Espino

Well, let's move into the activism that swelled around the Chicano Moratorium. I'm not sure if education was one of the major issues at that time?

Nava

No, it wasn't, and I wasn't involved. I knew about it and knew many of the people, sympathized, but I wasn't involved at that time. Integration and the school board and the campus just had me close to blowing a fuse. I sometimes wonder why I didn't blow a fuse. So I was against the war and spoke out against it. I once had the occasion to express my views to Henry Kissinger, no less. I was on the Los Angeles World Affairs Council while I was on the board, so I was invited to join. And once a month we had someone very big come. I'm sure they were paid ten, fifteen thousands dollars plus expenses. And on one of these occasions Kissinger spoke and he gave a good talk, because he's a brilliant fellow. But members of the board on which I sat on these luncheon occasions always had a private lunch with the guest speaker,

and the board was comprised of about fifteen people, and the guest speaker.

So we got into dialogue, and I got a chance to ask him, "Mr. Secretary, don't you think we are fighting the wrong guys in Vietnam?" And everybody [pauses], and by this time you build up this theatrical ability when you're giving speeches. You must have a pause, okay, to let him ask, "Well, what do you mean?" in his mind. I said, "I'm aware of the fact that Ho Chi Minh several years ago communicated with the United States and asked that we ally with him in unifying Vietnam in order to avoid Chinese aggression, which as you know is historic." Chinese have always wanted to seize Vietnam. And he looked at me in a very, who's this guy, you know. He didn't ask, who's this guy. And he said, "That's a fascinating option, but," he said, "history has passed us by and it is no longer available." And then I let somebody else ask the question, "But we need not have gone to war in Vietnam, because they unified the country anyway." And he wanted to be friends with us.

And at that time--I didn't know it--about that time, just before, during, or after, he was arranging to meet with Mao Tse-tung and make an arrangement with communist China in order to undercut the Soviet Union. That was the reason for it, and also resolve the matter in Vietnam if at all possible. But--well, that's another matter. So that was going on about that time, the option was no longer available. When I was designated for ambassador, in the briefing I had with the CIA, down about four floors underground, I thought bomb-proof--you only see the top of Langley Field on television, the gate and sometimes the lobby. I learned, because I started asking a lot of hard questions, because the young man, he was an Ivy Leaguer. They all know each other, you know. "I went to Yale. I went to Amherst," whatever. You know, they're up here, and maybe rightly so. They run the country.

Anyway, I was asking some tough questions. I was all right, because after all I'd graduated from Harvard, so I must be all right. And one thing led to another and then he said, because I asked something that provoked his response, he said, "Kissinger won over Mao Tse-tung by taking over a big booklet about three inches thick, two by three feet, big photographs, color, of U.S. satellite pictures showing where in China the major deposits are of coal, iron, copper, zinc, gold, and water, underground water. And Mao Tse-tung," he said, "he just dropped his mouth when Kissinger presented this booklet to him and then turned it around so that Mao Tse-tung could see it, and then flipped some of the pages. And Mao Tse-tung," he said, "asked, 'But why are these in funny colors?' And then Kissinger said, 'Well, the cameras are sensitive to certain things, and so these are not photographs in the usual term, but it will show you that in the Gobi Desert you have an ocean of water.'" And Mao Tse-tung must have figured, "Yeah, the Himalayas drain north as well as south, so the water is drained into the Gobi Desert on down deep," so all you have to do is go down three or four hundred feet and tap into a great big reservoir of fresh water.

But where the coal, where the gold, where the silver, where the zinc, where the copper, all these basic--I was going to say exotic--metals are found that are indispensable to developing an industrial society. And so this young guy said, "That won over Mao to Nixon's offer to be friends." Now he said, "Well, they probably would have found most of that stuff, but maybe twenty or thirty years later, and here it was, all of it." And I think Kissinger, if I remember right, the young guy said, "He told Mr. Mao, Chairman Mao, he said, 'I present you your country.'" So that's just an anecdote regarding why. Of course, I wasn't an ambassador yet, I was simply on the school board. That's why I was on the Los Angeles World Affairs Council. But when I left the embassy I contacted them as a feeler, and I didn't get the return of my phone calls.

In other words, don't help except if you're forced to, and so we still face that but in a different context and just as effectively, in some respects even more so, because to turn back a qualified black renders you potentially guilty of racism, but it's easier and safer to be prejudiced against a Mexican than to be charged with being anti-black, and so that's another freno, break that we have to overcome in gaining access to significant positions. We're not black. We don't have that privilege, even before Obama's election, and all the more so now.

Espino

Well, I think we're going to stop it right there. That's almost three hours, and that's a great place to stop, and we'll pick up next time--we're up to the seventies now--when you get back. Okay, thank you.

1.5. Session 4 (August 25, 2009)

Espino

This is Virginia Espino and today is August 25, 2009. I'm interviewing Dr. Julian Nava at his home in Valley Center, California. Okay, Dr. Nava, we're going to start today with your appointment as an ambassador under the Carter administration. Can you start from the beginning, how it came to pass that you were selected?

Nava

Well, I had no idea it was going to happen. Literally, I was mowing the lawn on a Saturday, huffing and puffing because the USC-UCLA football game was going to start at twelve or twelve-thirty, and so I wanted to finish and take a shower and sit down with a beer. And Patty [Nava] yelled out, "Telephone!" And I said, "Oh, damn it." So I turned off the motor and ran into the garage where there is a telephone, because I was all messed up, and huffing and puffing with annoyance I yelled out, "Hello, who is this?" or, "What is it?" I

didn't expect a call. And so the person said who he was and then asked me, "Is this Professor Julian Nava?" And I was huffing and breathing hard, and I blurted out, "No, it's Christopher Columbus," because I didn't recognize his name. And I asked, "Who did you say you were?" He said, "I am so-and-so. Now, is this Professor Nava?" And I said, "What is this about?" I was in a bad mood because he was upsetting my morning schedule. Then he said, "Were you born on June 19, 1927?" "Yeah. What's this about?" And he said, "Do you recognize [series of numbers]?" "Yeah. How'd you get my driver's license number?"

And then he said, "What about--," I'd annoyed him, and he said, "What about [series of numbers]?" And by now I was no longer breathing hard, and I said, oh, shit. This guy found my Navy serial number. I said, "How did you get my Navy serial number?" That has all kinds of implications, okay? And he said, "Well, that is not important now. I've been instructed to let you know--to discuss something briefly with you, but if this conversation proceeds any further, it must be on the basis of strict, complete confidence. You are not to talk to anyone about what we talk about." And I said, "You don't mean my wife [Pat Nava]?" He said, "No one." I said, "Well, my wife would not talk about something." And he said, "No, she wouldn't, but she might talk to her mother, Mrs. Kay Lucas," so he knew my mother-in-law, "And, of course, she would not talk to anyone about it, Professor, except Larry Lucas," Pat's brother, "and he would not talk to anyone about it except his wife Elaine [Lucas]."

So I said, "Okay, I understand. I will not talk to my wife or anyone else." And then he said, "Your name has come under consideration as a possible ambassador to Mexico." I was aplomb, just, "What?" And he said, "If you are interested, we will provide you with tickets and a letter inviting you to give a lecture on Mexico-U.S. relations to a group in Washington, D.C., which doesn't exist, but that's the cover." And I said,

"When?" He said, "Very soon, within the next week." So I said, "Very well, agreed." "Well, thank you very much." Click, and that was it. So I went back and finished mowing the lawn, very thoughtful, and went in, took a shower, and watched the football game, and I think by Tuesday I'd received a letter inviting me to give a talk to some group on inter-American affairs, with tickets and indication of where I was to stay in a hotel. So I told Pat the usual story, that I was going to give a talk on something. So off I went and told my department chairman, "I've got to go somewhere." "Oh, you do? Oh, okay, we'll get your classes covered. How long will you be gone?" "Well, I don't know, but probably two or three days." "Okay, okay." By that time I was a full professor, so full professors are accommodated.

And so off I went, and I began a series of interviews with State Department people. We got along fine. They talked to me about U.S.-Mexican things. And then I was scheduled to meet with Senator [Samuel Ichiye] Hayakawa, a Japanese American senator who served only one term, because not even the Republicans would support him for reelection, because he kept sleeping in the Senate, and when I finally went to talk to him he mentioned he was not running for reelection because he said, "I can't stand these jerks. They don't know a subject from a predicate, and they go on too long." He said, "I just take naps in the Senate."

Anyway, I was interviewed also by the White House, Bob Pastor was his name, special assistant to the president, and then I also was interviewed out at Langley Field by the CIA, down deep about three floors underneath the ground level, and the guy turned out to be a Harvard graduate, so that immediately established the bond, and he told me a lot of things he might not have told other people. But he explained why the Chinese accepted the request of the president to discuss a realignment of the U.S.-Chinese relations. At that time we were fighting in Korea, and [Henry] Kissinger

arranged to get an invitation to go and meet Mao Tse-tung, and this young guy told me, he said--I had already signed a paper saying nothing that I heard or discussed was I free to mention to anybody else, but this much later I've mentioned this in a couple of places since. He said, "Kissinger took along a great big book." He said, "It was about this big." His hands were not completely stretched out, but like about twenty or thirty inches, a great big, thick book, and he laid it out before Mao Tse-tung and he flipped over one or two pages that had photographs of China in different colors, blotches here and there, and Kissinger this young man said, explained to Mao Tse-tung, "Mr. Premier, here is where the coal is located in China."

And Mao Tse-tung was curious. He said, "You mean--?" And Kissinger said, "Yes. Our satellites can detect where the coal is," and he knows the geography of his country. He said, "Oh, we know about these locations, but we didn't know about these." So Kissinger flipped the page and he said, "And this is where your iron is located," and he did that about four times, this young man said, "where the silver is, and where there's vast stores of underground water." And it turns out there's an awful lot of water in the Gobi Desert, but it's down deep. It's water over the millenniums that has seeped down from the Himalayas northward and gone into the sand. It's down below. It's like saying sand (sic) in the Mojave Desert, but not on the surface. And so Kissinger somewhere along the line, I think at the beginning said, "Mr. Premier, I want to present your country to you," and Mao Tse-tung didn't understand until he flipped the page and said, "This is where the coal is." Invaluable information.

And this young guy said, "Of course, god damn it," he said, "they probably would have found the stuff over time, but it certainly was a tremendously powerful gesture of goodwill." And so that's then what led to later negotiations for reestablishment of diplomatic relations and pulling China away

from Russia, which was our objective, to break the two apart. So I remember telling this story to a group of powerful Jews in Los Angeles, and they were astounded by it. They said, "Julian, you mean Kissinger did that?" "Yeah, he did that." "Are you sure?" I said, "Well, I'm as sure as a CIA officer telling me and saying it was quite a coup and explaining, 'Those bastards probably would have found all this junk anyway, but this saved them twenty, thirty years.'" And that was the CIA interview.

And then the interview with Hayakawa didn't last long, about ten minutes, niceties. "Oh, so you teach at California State University," blah, blah, because he taught at San Francisco State University and rose to politics because you may remember he got up on top of this sound truck during student demonstrations against the war, and he was out of patriotism just disgusted, and this professor just climbed up on top of this truck and he pulled all the wires loose from the loudspeakers, and there was a scuffle, of course, and there were police around, because they were patrolling the situation anyway, so they rescued Hayakawa from angry students who probably would have beaten him up. They didn't know who it was. It was just this man climbed up on the truck and tore out the wires to their loudspeakers, and so that made him a hero among Republicans.

Well, when we got down to business he simply was interested in, "Tell me professor, if appointed, do you think after your service you would run for public office again?" Click, click, click, my computer, you know, was spinning. I said, "Mr. Senator, I can assure you my years as an elected officer are completely over, and that phase in my life is past." And I could see kind of visible relief on his part, because there were rumors that he might run again at that time, and he dreaded the thought that Ambassador Nava would run against him. And so he said, "I think everything will go well in the Senate." I'd heard before that the senior senator from a state can just politely veto you, and other senators will abide by that. He can

be neutral and he can be supportive, but if he nixes you, then as a courtesy the Senate will simply not advise and consent.

So I guess I was there about a week, which is interesting because often these Senate confirmations last longer, and while I was there the Senate acted unanimously and advise and consent, Nava for Mexico. Then I was told, "Why don't you have your family or close friends come for the swearing-in ceremony?" So I called home and immediately about twelve family members said, "Oh, we want to go, we want to go." And some close political friends, including Eddie Albert, and what was his wife's name [Margo Albert], a Mexican American gal? I forget, but she played in a number of movies, always a B part but a good supporting actress.

Espino

Not Carmen Zapata?

Nava

No, not Carmen, no, not Carmen. Her name might come to me--and Eddie Albert, who had made already a number of movies and liked everything Mexican because of his wife. Eddie Albert was an unappreciated actor. You look at some of his supporting roles, and he did a very nice job. Anyway, he never got an Oscar. So Eddie Albert was there, and we met and had tea and cookies at the White House, but interestingly enough, I did not meet President [Jimmy] Carter until everything had been cleared and the Senate had approved me, unlike, let's say, [President Barack] Obama today, okay. Now, I learned from a State Department official who said, "I can only give you some of the information; the rest is confidential. You were--," because I asked, "Well, how come?" And he said, "President Carter changed a lot of things from tradition." That's one reason that a large part of the Democratic Party was lukewarm in his reelection, and some were opposed to him, like Senator Ted Kennedy, who threw his hat in the ring in the Democratic primary against President Carter. That was really a deep stab.

But then he withdrew late in the primary and Carter was re-nominated and then went on to lose for other reasons not related to how good of a job he was doing.

President Carter rebelled against the traditional or the historical method of appointing ambassadorships as political rewards, and U.S. embassies abroad are in two broad categories, Class A and Class B. The Class A are only about six. They are the obvious ones, France, England, Germany, Israel, China, Russia, and Mexico. Mexico is among the Class-A embassies. And at that time I didn't know Mexico was the largest embassy. It had about 1200 people working in that building, and it was physically the largest embassy, about an eight-story building with three stories underground and the largest in terms of personnel, and it was so important it was really more important than London because of the trade and commerce, immigration and everything between the two neighbor countries. So there was a lot of surprise, well, in some quarters surprise at the selection.

But Carter appointed a committee of about--I was never told the number, but I could have guessed from what this young guy said, about thirteen, a member of the Senate, Republican and Democratic, I mean, both parties from the Senate, two members of the House, bipartisan, and someone from the State Department, someone from the National Security Agency or the CIA, one of the two, one of the security agencies, someone from the White House, and then one prominent businessman, one prominent labor person, a prominent black person, and then some woman. So that was the committee, and their job, a volunteer job, was to put three names on the desk of the president, a one-page breakdown, and they were to interview or rather they were to consider self-offers or proposals by somebody and then winnow it down in terms of who was the best qualified to be U.S. ambassador in that particular country, not just Mexico. But I think this committee worked only--I don't know for sure, but I think it made sense

that this committee worked only on the Class-A embassies, because these were all volunteers.

So someone put my name before that committee, and two or three people have hinted that they did it, and like that saying goes, success has many fathers. But it's interesting that two very prominent local Mexican American guys that I knew very well and had worked with politically a long time, tried to sabotage the appointment. They asked me out for lunch and we talked about the appointment, and they were also glad about it. Well, at this point it was a designation. The Senate had not yet acted, but they found out about it. "Oh, well, Julian, we're so glad and delighted you worked in the barrio," and then blah, blah, blah, "on the board," and blah, blah, blah, "and we want to do anything we can to help. Tell us. We would be very happy to head off any problems that might develop. Is there anything in your background or anything that you've done that might turn out to be embarrassing when you're scrutinized?" And that's with Hayakawa.

My wheels spun and I said, "Well, no, except a couple of traffic tickets." "Oh, well, good, good, good." Now, why do I say they were going to sabotage it? Because then they would then leak, "Dr. Nava had an illegitimate child," let's say, or, "Dr. Nava--." Police records don't work, because the FBI checked all that stuff. They know more about me than I knew about myself. But asking that question could only have produced problems, because what could they do to help in the case that something like that happened? And so ever since then I've always just, "Hello, fine, nice to see you," but I'm on guard.

But anyway, the whole family went, and we got sworn in and then--

Espino

Okay, we're back.

Nava

Yes, President Carter was very cordial, very friendly, and he's completely bilingual. So is his wife as a matter of fact, and they were very concerned about U.S.-Mexican relations, chiefly hoping that I might persuade [José] López Portillo, the President of Mexico, to sell us more oil. The Arab oil boycott was in effect. It began, you may recall, at the end of the Nixon term and then was a terrible disadvantage to President Ford when he was trying to run against Carter, and those kinds of things take a year or so before they impact the economy, so by the time Carter came to office we were in a recession like the one of today, and there was very little that the White House could do. I remember that gas went up to about four dollars a gallon, and there were long, long lines, I mean block-long lines at gasoline stations to get gas. I mean, the gas was cut off because of our support for Israel.

So the Mexican regime, which is not a part of OPEC but follows the OPEC line on prices and oil-sales politics, had continued to sell us oil at the same volume as before, but would not increase it, because the Mexican position was that--and it was true. President Carter, in light of the global situation, wanted to increase our petroleum reserves. We buy oil and then pump it into the ground, mind you. How do you like that? Pump it into the ground, huge reservoirs, in case we need it. Then we just take it out. And López Portillo would have nothing of that, and I could not persuade López Portillo to increase oil sales to the United States, which is no surprise, but that was very much on Carter's mind.

So it was a fascinating experience in Mexico. Pat and the kids went, including our two dogs at the time. I remember newspapermen always try to provoke you to say something troublesome in Mexico, up here, too, but not so much, frankly, because there are about eight newspapers in Mexico City, and they fight for circulation, and so they want something to cast the public like, "The ambassador said this, the ambassador said that." So the previous U.S. ambassador came alone and

lived in this huge mansion. I mean, our bedroom was the size of this living room, literally. The bed was over there; a huge mansion. But not with his wife. His wife did not want to live in Mexico. His name was, I think, Patrick [Joseph] Lucey, L-u-c-e-y. He did not speak Spanish. I met him and spoke to him briefly in Washington, D.C., before I went back.

In fact, he quit the ambassadorship to help Ted Kennedy, so that was a very sad thing for Carter. That was really a rebellion within the Democratic Party, which was already unhappy with Carter because he was the first Democratic president elected by primaries. You won't remember, but before that nominees were selected at conventions. They were selected at conventions, and candidates to the convention from parties were committed but not bound to vote for somebody, and Carter was the first one under a new system that was elected by primaries, where you won the state, and if you won a state then you won all of the votes from that state, and so when a convention met it was a foregone conclusion who had the votes, which is what happened with Obama. After Iowa, why, things started to turn, because Obama won Iowa to everyone's surprise, probably to his own surprise.

In any case, the situation was very, very precarious internationally and at home, and the job there was very touch and go. I had a large team which I called the Cabinet, and we met daily, and each member of the team was a representative of a member of the Cabinet, and so I won their loyalty over rather early, because I told them, I said, "Look." There were, as a matter of fact, no ladies there. All the representatives were men. I said, "Look, fellows." I said, "I'm an appointee. Appointees come and go. You stay at least for a three-year term. You can be reappointed, but a three-year term, so I can't do a good job without you. But as you know, the ambassador files an annual personnel report on performance for each one of you, so I can help you if you help me." And they all kind of smiled. They knew that I was, in effect,

threatening them. But I told them, "I'll tell you how you can help me." I said, "Tell me what you think, no holds barred, and not what you believe or guess I would like to hear, and I assume all of you know what you're doing and that you're doing it well, and I hope that some ambassadors come out of this group. Who knows? But let's work together." And everybody's--so just kind of made gestures on the desk. And so we got along very well.

Every now and then, however, we had to discuss something serious, and we knew the Russians were listening in on the embassy like we listened in on their embassy from listening posts nearby that penetrated deep into the building. So when anything very sensitive came up, we would meet in the bubble. Now, the bubble was a small room, just enough for twenty people at a long table, a small room that was in another room that was larger, that was in another room that was larger, that was then part of the building. So we had triple isolation and we could talk freely in this bubble. And also when I had to call Washington, which was not often, to say something or another, or get a message, and we did not want the Russians to listen, because they could listen in to our telephone conversations like we could listen in to their telephone conversations, and each knew that of the other--I would then get on a special telephone. I forget what they called it. It was in a separate room, but it was a coded phone where I spoke and then they scrambled my speech into [makes noises], and the phone on the other side then unscrambled it. It was a scrambling phone.

So there were all interesting things like that. I traveled a lot around Mexico and made it a point of meeting with groups that Pat [Patrick] Lucey never met with, like university students and labor groups, women's groups and student groups, and often had a lot of fiery discussions with these groups, most of which, not all but many of which conversations were reported in the press, because someone in the group then reported

what Ambassador Nava said. [unclear] I bawled them out, in effect saying, stop bitching, stop complaining, "No se quejan tanto. Stop complaining about the United States. The problems with Mexico are made in Mexico." And then I used that phrase, "Por eso estamos como estamos. Unions make unrealistic demands. Big business makes far too much money. Almost no one pays income tax, right? And you've installed a tax system like ours. You've copied ours. Fine. Ours is pretty good, but almost nobody in Mexico pays anywhere near what they should pay in income taxes, middle-class and up." So much of the country is wretchedly poor and lives on subsistence farming.

But I once went to talk to labor leaders whose leader was Fidel Velásquez, an older gentleman. He could stop the Mexican economy just by saying, "Un paro." That was it, and not even the president could do anything about it. But the labor union Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos was in close alliance with the government, with the PRI [Partido Revolucionario Institucional], but they did not always agree, so the president really had a lot of respect for Fidel Velásquez. So we met for ostensibly a confidential session, which did prove to be confidential, talking about U.S.-Mexican relations, and so there were a lot of complaints about the United States, and I listened to it and listened to it and listened to it. He said, "Well, what do you think Mr. Ambassador?", Fidel Velásquez, "What do you think?"

I told him in Spanish, of course, I said, "Well, we're a big country, and we have a little of everything. We have good people and we have bad people, and we have honest officials and we have corrupt officials. And you know what? We probably have more corrupt officials than you do, and you have an awful lot of them, but I think we beat you." They all burst out laughing, all these--they're all older gentlemen--burst out laughing that the ambassador in effect said, "Mexico has a lot of crooked officials, but you know what, we have more than you do." [laughs] So there were a lot of interesting

sessions that I had like that, the university people, the administration said, "Why do you just take anybody who has a warm body in, when they're only taking one or two courses and it'll take them ten years to get their degree, if not fifteen? And by the time they graduate, they don't remember what they took the first three or four years?" "Well, you must understand politically--." So we had a lot of exchanges.

But I also got--oh, there are a lot of things that happened that were fun. I thought that one thing that would help Mexican higher education would be to inject some American higher education, and so I got in touch with the guy in Texas who was the head of the U.S. Community Colleges Association, forget the name of the association, it has a colorful name, and he sent down someone to talk to me, and then this association agreed to set up some campuses in Mexico if the Mexican government would permit them, not to give degrees but to offer courses that Mexicans could enter and take freely, and therefore see what an American class operated like, and also be more open to accepting Mexican students who wanted to study in some community college in the U.S.

Now, some of that was already going on, but this would be a new policy and an effort to increase this kind of cross-border activity. Then I got in touch with Derek Bok at Harvard, and he called the next day after I got through to his office. And during that day they found out Ambassador Nava graduated from Harvard, so he's got to be okay. And so I said, "Why doesn't Harvard establish a research or study center in Mexico?" "Really? Now, there's an idea." He was very receptive, and he said, "I'd like to talk to you but," he said, "I can't get down there." And I said, "Well, I'm going up to visit family in southern California." I'd found out that he was a Californian, and so we arranged to meet in Beverly Hills somewhere, and he said, "It sounds like a very good idea. We can open up joint-research activities in Mexico."

And then I talked also--

Espino

We're back.

Nava

I got through to the president of the U-CAL system. In the state colleges, the top guy is called chancellor; you have it the other way around. So I forget his name, and so he said, "Sounds like a great idea." He said, "I'd like to talk to my Cabinet about it. When are you coming up? Are you coming up any time soon?" So I was as a matter of fact going to make a trip up, back to California, just two or three days and then back. They always sat me in the front of the airplane, sat me last after everybody else was on, and then I came up a different ladder into the airplane, okay, because a U.S. ambassador in Mexico or in his country, whichever it is, France or Germany, has literally the authority of the American president in that country, so they really watch out for you, okay.

So I went up to Berkeley and met with him. What was his name? A very nice man. So we spoke about that, and then I raised the question about, "When are you guys going to have--," because we got to where we were personal. We were having scotches, Cutty Sark, my favorite. So he said, "I happen to have Cutty Sark." So I said, "When are you guys going to get a Mexican chancellor?" He said, "Come to think of it, we have never had a Mexican chancellor." And he said, "I wonder why." I said, "It's the old-boys' school." I said, "Like people select like people, and given the state of the union isn't it about time?" He said, "Yeah, it's about time." But he said, "You know, I've got a hell of a problem. Presidents work through so god damn many committees, and you can't do anything significant without a committee approving it." So by this time I'd had two scotches. I told him, "Oh, hell--," his name is coming back. I said, "Oh, hell. You're the president. You can

do whatever you want, if you want to." He said, "Well, hell, I hadn't looked at it that way before."

And about six months later I read in the L.A. Times--I had come back already--I read in the L.A. Times an article that he had indicated to the media that he had designated a Mexican American president to University of California at Riverside. What was his name? I'm ashamed I don't remember. Tomás Rivera? I think his name was Tomás Rivera--and that he expected that university committees would agree. He acted like the president, and that's how Tomás was appointed to U-CAL Riverside, where later he asked me to come and give a commencement address, and we reminisced about that. And who was Tomás? Tomás was a poet at some college in Texas, not a scientist, not a big-time heavyweight. He was a poet, and the president, Tomás told me, at supper at his home, the president's home, President [David] Saxon, that was his name, read his little book, his little book on poetry and liked it and thought that he had the sensitivity and the ideas and the perception that would make a good president and a good chancellor. And his wife said, "But he's going to kill himself, he's working so hard," she said, "trying to prove that he can be a good chancellor, and I'm telling him to not do it, to slow down and to hell with them," because there was resistance to his designation on the campus.

And Tomás actually did die from overwork. That's what I figure, because he was otherwise in good health. I think he died from overwork, the first Chicano chancellor. I don't know if there's been any since, because like people select like people, and they want outstanding leaders in some field, which I think is a good idea, but it's not the only way to get a leader, especially in changing times.

So Carter was not reelected, and I told President-elect [Ronald] Reagan that I would be willing to stay on and do a good job for him, and I told him, "Have your guys check me out." So they did check me out, chiefly with the U.S. Chamber

of Commerce in Mexico, with whom I had established a very good relationship, because one of the jobs of the U.S. ambassador in any country is to promote U.S. economic interests. And I would ask regularly, about every other week, American CEOs in Mexico to come to the ambassador's-- everybody called it the residence--to come to the residence, and we would have--those who smoked cigars would smoke cigars, and I don't smoke at all, but we would have hard drinks, and the rules of the game were that nothing we talked about there would be said anywhere else, and the object of the meetings were to help each other do better business in Mexico.

But I was there and then I had an assistant with me who had a tape-recorder memory, and he would then write up a report in essence of what GE said, what GM said, what everybody said in essence, and if it was relevant then we would send the essence of this, no names involved, of course, back to the State Department, so the State Department knew what the private sector thought. No one had thought of doing that before, just like I had every member of the Cabinet send a weekly--I said one-pager preferably, two pages at most, to their boss in the Cabinet. No one had thought of doing that before. I said, "These guys back there have to know what's going on in such an important country as Mexico, so stick to the point. I know you guys can do it better than I can, just main things that are going out that effect immigration, that effect trade," that would affect whatever it is.

Anyway, the Secretary of State wanted to keep me on, told me so, and Reagan said, "I'll think about it, Julian," because he knew I was a Californian, school board, and that I had run for State Superintendent of Public Instruction. He knew that. Got 17 percent of the vote so it's not bad, California-wide, but we didn't have enough money. Anyway, and Wilson Riles was running, and all liberals for the black, Mexicans will have to wait. Anyway, Nancy Reagan, I learned, who had very strong influence on Ronnie [Ronald Reagan], wanted John Gavin, a

friend that she had done one or two movies with, B movies, but they were just genuinely, just truly good friends, and she got Ronnie to appoint John Gavin, whose name went over like a lead balloon in Mexico. Un actor, you know, who had stopped making movies ten years ago and was down to, I say--big full face, because he was so damn handsome--liquor ads, Mexican liquor ads on billboards all over Mexico before his designation. It's a famous cognac or something. He was plastered all over Mexico, and I heard before I left Mexico City that President López Portillo called, or someone from his office called the president of that liquor company and said, "The president would greatly appreciate it if you were to simply plaster over all of those ads showing Mr. John Gavin, who has been designated the next U.S. ambassador." And they wouldn't do it at first, and so López Portillo called and told him, "I would very much as a personal favor appreciate it if--," and that was a threat, "I would appreciate it as a personal, un favor personal," and so within a week all those ads--there must have been 500 if not 1,000 plastered all over Mexico--all of a sudden had something else on them.

And López Portillo invited Pat and the kids to Los Pinos, and we had a very pleasant tidbits day or some little thing, and my son Paul [Nava] had his nose up against this big glass-enclosed display of weapons. I guess López Portillo gathered weapons, and López Portillo saw what Paul was doing. "Oh, ¿Te gusta una de éstas?" "Si." The naivete of an eight- or nine-year-old boy; oh, he's more like twelve. And so López Portillo opened up with a key and slid the door aside. "¿Cuál?" And Paul said, "Esa," a great big pistol. And so López Portillo got this pistol and said, "¿Mira, sabes quién usaba ésta? Billy the Kid." So he knew that name, Billy the Kid. "¿No te mira que gastaba es? ¿Cuántos hombres ha matado ésta pistola?" And then he gave Paul this great big pistol, and Paul's mouth just dropped, and Paul still has that pistol. But the president said--it's a .45, which is a big pistol. You'd better be a big man or shoot it properly. He said, "Don't ever shoot it." He said,

"Está muy gastada." He said, "I would never--I don't trust it to be fired anymore."

And we left. We left, and that was kind of a make-believe experience, but all the time that we were there, every now and then when it seemed appropriate I would tell the kids, I would say, "This is make believe. We're all going to go back to Northridge and go to school, and I'm going to go back to the campus, and we're all going to resume our normal ordinary life. This is all make believe." And I think they took it to heart. Like in one case Carmen and Katie [Nava]--they were tall for their age--were on a volleyball team for their high school in Mexico City. It's called the American School, but it's a school where children of well-to-do foreigners go. Instruction is in English. They were on the volleyball team, and just purely by luck that year their team was in the runoff against another private Mexican school, also well-to-do people, and they were playing in the playoff, the championship. And literally what happened, they were tied, the two teams were tied, and you know how it is in volleyball, you have to win by two points, so they'd gone back and forth, back and forth about two if not three times, and purely by chance, it's almost like a Hollywood ending, one or the other, I forget who, set up her sister, and her sister then spiked the ball for the winning point of the second game and the championship. And everybody on the Mexican team called them las gemelas, not Carmen and Katie, las gemelas. And so their team won the championship that year.

But there was an important reception at the residence that night, and the Chief of Police, Arturo Durazo, who had a dark, dark, black, black reputation, flew the girls in his personal helicopter to the residence across town, and Pat and I were driven in the embassy car with a police escort in front clearing traffic, and we got back over to the residence in time to start receiving guests. But the girls were flown back by the chief of police's personal helicopter. Everybody called him El Negro

Durazo, a mean guy, but a very nice guy, but he was very, very mean in his job, and he made an awful lot of money through graft, through graft.

But I had him checked out, and his dossier was about an inch and a quarter thick. I read the whole damn thing, and he was not involved in narcotics. He got his money from paybacks from people importing stuff at the airport, because he was in charge of airport security, and that's where he got his money. And he had this beautiful home on the hill overlooking Mexico City, to which he invited us, and he very proudly showed us the basketball court for his son, spoiled rotten, handsome but nice-looking, personable but spoiled rotten. And the basketball court would slide away to reveal this great big swimming pool, and he was so proud of his wealth. And his wife was beautiful, charming, charming, charming, and a very, very nice person. I learned later that when the new president came in, Miguel de la Madrid, charges were filed against Durazo. You can't file charges against the president, okay? And he was put in jail briefly, then let out pending--his wife divorced him. No, she abandoned him, lo abandano, and got into a private plane at the airport, at the far end of the airport, with suitcases full of money, probably about 25 million dollars, and flew to Canada, and then announced from Canada she was divorcing him.

And I was very dubious, and I said, "She's protecting him." She's taking their money to Canada, and she hopes that everybody will expect that she's a good-for-nothing tramp and she left her husband, but he'll get out of prison, "And when he gets out of prison he'll know where I am and where our money is. It's in Canada." Because Pat and I got to meet her well enough to know that she really cared for Arturo, and that was just a ploy to save their money. So there were a lot of episodes like that that made the experience a unique one. Then we came back and resumed life at CSUN [California State University, Northridge].

Espino

Were you the first Mexican American to be appointed?

Nava

Yes, first to Mexico, right.

Espino

Do you think there was any suspicion about your loyalties at that time?

Nava

Oh, there were probably--not really, not really. If there were, they would have come up in the talks with the State Department people and the people in Washington, and, of course, they had access to probably most of my talks, and so, no, that was not a--some opponents probably thought that, but never voiced it publicly, never voiced it publicly, because when you get down to it, it would be a very bad argument. We've sent a lot of French people to be ambassadors to France, many Anglos to be ambassadors to England, so what's so special about sending a Mexican to Mexico? A couple of newspapers asked that question and I answered that way. And the reporters would say, "Yeah, come to think of it, sure."

Espino

Well, it seems that it took you by surprise, so how did you determine what your role would be? Was it after you spoke with President Carter, or was it while you were on the job, or did you--

Nava

Mostly on the job, but the State Department people told us, "Our primary interest is petroleum, our oil supply," and immigration, but cross-border undocumented immigration was not a serious issue then. It was beginning to be an issue, but it was not anything like it was just ten years later. There were discussions about that, and another interest we had was in getting Mexico to join what was called the GATT, the General

Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, which Mexico resisted, but ultimately López Portillo resisted it. First he said he was going to, and then he changed his mind at the last minute. So we were trying to get like the major countries of Western Europe, coordination among economies, which tended to favor the more powerful, just like global trade today favors the powerful, not the weak or smaller countries. It's a way of taking control of the world economy, so-called free global trade. Freedom of the jungle, that's a figure of speech I've used often, and it was a figure of speech that I picked up from López Portillo, libertad de la selva, free trade. That's why he did not want to join GATT, because it would start to limit import-exports and fees and tariffs and so forth. He said, "Libertad de la selva, es lo que quieren." So there were a number of geopolitical issues like that.

Espino

What was your relationship with López Portillo?

Nava

I didn't see him often, but it was good. He was a university professor of political science, and so that established an immediate bond, and he was very, very intelligent and high-minded. In other words, he saw things. I think he was more intelligent than his nominee, Miguel de la Madrid after him. Miguel was a good man, he just was not a heavyweight. López Portillo was a heavyweight in every respect, and, of course, Mexico was very, very prosperous till the very end of his term when oil prices dropped and Mexico plunged. The peso plunged by more than 100 percent. Yes, so he left in economic disgrace like President [George W.] Bush did, and not of his making. It was global, like much of Bush's problems were global, but mostly, I think, the expenses of the war in Iraq, which were not in the budget. We just simply borrowed from Communist China. Please explain our policy towards Cuba in light of that.

Espino

Did you have political discussions with López Portillo about politics?

Nava

Yes, some. Yes, and he was very, very well-read. That's why I said high-minded. He understood things, the big picture, let's say. He understood the big picture and that, for example, ultimately the Mexican economy and Mexico depended on this relationship with the United States. By the same token Mexico said, "We're at your mercy. You do just one little thing and it has a profound effect in Mexico." And he would not allow American oil companies to help Mexico find more oil. He said, "No, es una cuestión puramente Mexicana." I forget the name of the head of PEMEX, a very nice guy, completely bilingual, and he said, "I know it makes sense, Julian." I went to see him two times to his office, and he said, "I know it makes sense, but you must understand it's just emotionally a Mexican cardinal fact that we will do the best we can, and we're doing very well ourselves when it comes to petroleum, because as you know, we've had a sad experience with you guys." [laughs] I said, "I know. I know, and I understand."

But then I told him, "But ARCO just wants to join in with you in making available the latest technical equipment." And ARCO was trying to do that. Lod [Lodwick] Cook was the CEO of ARCO, one of the biggest oil companies in the world, but what's-his-name said, "There's a lot to be said for it," he said, "but it's just too big. Can't do it." And I remember that he had -his name will come to me, because I haven't thought about these things for, what, twenty-five years? He had a secretary who was beautiful. I mean, taste differs, okay? But she's every bit as beautiful as Miss Venezuela. There's something wrong with what they eat in Venezuela. They produce so many beautiful women. But that's true. I lived there a year and it's true. There are beautiful gals walking around all over the place. I wonder what's the matter with their genes.

Anyway, this gorgeous gal, and he was very respectful of her. She was just his secretary and came in and he gave instructions. She took everything in shorthand and so forth. And he said, "Look at her," as she was walking away. He said, "Just look at her, Julian." We were speaking in English, and he said, "You know what's happened?" "No, what's happened?" "She's going to get married." "Yeah? That's good." "Julian, that gorgeous creature is going to marry a truck driver." "Oh, shit, don't tell me." "Yeah. I had him checked out. He's a god damn truck driver." And so he said, "Well," he said, "she's a great secretary and probably he's going to insist that she stay home." So that's what he was sorry, because he said, "She's brilliant. She's efficient. She's everything." And he got fired by López Portillo, Serrano, that was his name, Jorge Serrano. I've been taking cognitive pills, you know, and I think they help.

Espino

Well, do you think that--

Nava

Because he raised the price of oil. No, he dropped the price of oil without getting the president's permission beforehand. That was what was wrong, not lowering the price, not getting the president's permission.

Espino

Overstepping his power.

Nava

Yes. He made a sound business decision, but he forgot that oil is a political thing, not an economic thing. You were going to say?

Espino

Yes, I was going to just say that, did you ever feel that there was a certain familiarity with the Mexicans, Mexican politicians

and people in the Mexican government with you because you're Mexican American?

Nava

I'm sure there was, but it was not evident in the media, because the media professionally had to be anti-American, and I was the fall guy, so anything that I said or didn't say that could be used to castigate the U.S. was used, so the Mexican media in print was not friendly. It was at best objective, at best, and not always objective, and I got this from Mexican reporters who I complained to. I said, "Como se les ocurrió decir eso? Yo no dije eso, porque es que lo dijeron ustedes?" "Bueno, lo implicó." "No lo implique, hablé muy claramente." "Bueno, usted, Señor embajador, tiene que comprender." Okay.

Espino

Well, what about the issue of you being used to persuade the U.S. government to a Mexican position?

Nava

No.

Espino

Did you ever feel that was--

Nava

No, I never felt that way. No. Mexico at that time was feeling its oats. It was ostensibly very prosperous. The government was giving tractors away to farmers, John Deere tractors, giving them away, very well-intentioned, but like one guy told me, he said, "The farmers don't realize that you have to change the oil every now and then, so a year or year and a half later the engine is wearing out because it ran out of oil." They could run the tractor, but they thought it would run forever. They put in diesel, but they forgot the oil and to change the filter. Those things are the lifeblood of a motor. If a

filter is changed regularly and oil is changed regularly, a good engine nominally will run practically forever. There's no friction. But Mexican agriculture did improve, and a lot of money was spent on good things. A lot of roads were built, dams were built. A lot of things were built and, of course, in all of those things favoritism to builders and working people like happens here, it's no different. Except down there the graft is more critical. It has a more immediate effect. But the favoritism here is as common as it is in Mexico. But then all of a sudden [makes noise] income plunged and then everything fell apart.

Espino

What were some of the biggest, most critical issues that you faced while you were ambassador?

Nava

It was trade, trade, trade and commerce and concern about the beginning of terrorism, much of it from Colombia. There was a group of gangsters and terrorists in Colombia called M-16 that were threatening me as a matter of fact, threatening the American ambassador and causing damage problems throughout Latin America. And, of course, there was a concern about Russian influence through Cuba, and a lot of Mexicans were not hostile to the Soviet Union, some if only to spite the U.S. But Russia had considerable influence in areas that sent on scholarships a lot of Mexicans to the Soviet Union to study, and there was a lot of communist influence in the labor unions. But communism in Latin America was not the vicious type that it was in the Soviet Union, where murders and things like that took place.

It was more socialist, just like Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua. He was a socialist, communist, okay, but he was a socialist. He permitted free elections, which under a strict communist regime you don't permit. And you may remember he was not reelected, and you may also remember he said, "Okay, I lost,"

and then he came back two terms later and was reelected again. So I knew that and those kinds of distinctions, and so, too, did the State Department staff in Mexico. They were smart guys. They weren't political ideologues, they were smart guys. So the volume of trade was the big thing, petroleum, gas, tariffs, the tuna issue. Mexico was extending its line of sovereignty farther out from the coast, which was a devastating blow, as it turned out a mortal blow to the tuna industry on the West Coast of the U.S., Oregon, Washington, and California, San Diego.

I remember coming to give a talk to the tuna people in San Diego. They were asking, "Is there anything you can do?" And I said, in effect, "No, because Mexico has the right to do that. It's actually no farther out than ours." Okay, that took care of that. And I said, "But remember, they will let you fish within the prohibited zone if you license your boats in Mexico and pay Mexican taxes," I said, "which are not heavy by the way. Mexico simply wants to control the industry." And most of the tuna growers here were very American. "We're not going to license our boats in Mexico. They might decide to confiscate them or something." I said, "Well, that could happen, but I don't really think it will. They just want a share of the pie. Your boats are better than the Mexican boats. You have radar and you can find the schools of tuna, and so it's your decision. However, between you and me, there really is nothing that the U.S. government can do. Mexico is acting within its sovereign rights. I'm sorry to tell you, but that's the way it is." So a few said, "We're glad that you didn't kid around, that you told us what it is. I don't know anybody who'd want to buy my tuna fleet, but--." Because some of those guys had maybe ten, fifteen boats, and tuna fishing was a big industry. I don't know who fishes for tuna now. I have not noticed any shortage of supply of tuna, so they could have just licensed in Mexico, had a front office and then just continued fishing.

Espino

No one agreed to that, those terms?

Nava

Some--I have no way of knowing. I have no way of knowing, and, of course, the Mexican fleet could not fine boats most of the time, no fishing. You could go into [unclear] fish and then come back out, so I don't know what happened except that there is no longer a tuna-fishing industry in San Diego. There never was in L.A. It was in San Diego, closer to Mexico where the better fishing areas are located.

Espino

What about the question of drug trafficking? Was that a problem?

Nava

Drug trafficking was a problem, but again it was not what it later came to be. We were starting to apply pressure on Colombia, and that's why M-16 was out to get the U.S. ambassador. The reason that I got to know El Negro Durazo and his wife Sylvia [Durazo]--her name came back to me--was that we got word at the embassy that M-16 was out after us, and I told the guy in charge of security, I said, "Well, can the U.S. government do anything more to protect us?" "There's not much more we can do, Julian." I said, "Because my girls go to school and my boy goes to school, and granted a driver takes them and brings them home, but," I said, "it's something that I worry about." I said, "If I'd been told by the State Department that there was this security issue, I might not have taken the job.

Espino

All right, we're back. You were talking about the security became more of an issue.

Nava

More of an issue. I mentioned this in passing one time to President [José] López Portillo, and he said, "Julian, we're aware of that, but we're watching the M-16 people in Mexico very closely." And then he told me, "I have already designated General Durazo," El Negro Durazo. He said, "I have already designated General Durazo to be personally in charge of your security, and so you will not be aware of it, but your children and your wife will always be under guard. It won't be obvious." And so that's in part why when Durazo asked Pat [Nava] and me to supper, and she said, "Why are we going over there? Didn't you say he has a very bad reputation?" I said, "Yeah, Pat, he has a bad reputation, but--," I told her, I think I told her at that time or later, I said, "he's in charge of our personal security, and the president said, 'I can assure you, nothing's going to happen to you while you're in Mexico.'" And nothing did.

Espino

Were your children allowed to go about the city on their own?
Did they always have--

Nava

They rarely went out. Oh, they never went out on their own, oh, no, oh, no. They went to planned events connected with their school, and there was plenty for them to do. They did not feel deprived, and they didn't have any particular desire to just wander around. Mexico City is a huge place. So we would go by invitation to some people's homes. Like I remember, I forget the name of the guy, a famous Mexican architect that got an international award, a very prestigious international award, and I read the papers every morning. I just went through about three or four of the major ones. And so I told my secretary Carmen, who I brought up from L.A.--she'd been my secretary at the Board of Education, Carmen Orozco Whitehead. I hired her and let the State Department one go, who was madder than hell because she liked Mexico. But

again, the ambassador can do whatever he wants to do, and Carmen enjoyed it.

Anyway, there were a number of cases where Carmen was very, very helpful, because she knew Mexico well and she knew the Mexican character and would often give me advice, because we'd been working not twelve years but ten years of the twelve years on the board; it was practically a family relationship. And so there were a lot of family things like that, and Carmen would sometimes take the girls somewhere shopping in an embassy car, and Durazo would know about it, and so there would always be, unbeknownst to the girls, agents here and there while they went around looking at tennis shoes, so to speak. So there were a lot of curious things involving the experience like that, and many of which the girls and Paul [Nava] were never aware of, and some of which Pat was not aware of. Why worry them?

And after that experience there were very few places I would like to go as a U.S. ambassador, unless it was a very special assignment, like Spain, like Turkey, like Bolivia of all places. Why Bolivia? Because it has almost all of the world's known supply of, I think it's called selenium, and selenium has turned out to be indispensable for the best, longer-lasting, charge-absorbing batteries, and so as more and more cars start to use batteries, selenium will become as valuable as gold practically, and Bolivia has most of what anyone knows is around, like diamonds in South Africa, let's say. So it's important for the U.S. that Evo Morales is very critical of the U.S. and for very, very good reasons. He's completely justified. But American ambassadors down there are second-rate; not second-rate but, well, they could be very, very good, because a lot of the Class-A ones are political appointees, which does not mean that they're good. They're there for a vacation, so to speak. But a good American ambassador in Bolivia could help turn around the politics there to assure that the U.S. companies get as much selenium as they want until something better comes

along, which apparently no one foresees. Selenium seems to be the top ingredient for the best batteries, which are important for space, they're important for the military, they're important for consumer use; selenium.

And Turkey because Turkey is a secular Muslim state. It's the only one, and it could be the state, because it wants to join the European Union, that could help a cultural campaign to start diverting activity among Muslims from political domination and terrorism, among a minority but supported by the majority, just like this guy from Lockerbie was accepted as a hero in Libya, okay. There is a cultural tradition in Islam which has withered away in the last 500 years of respect for and support for cultural and intellectual activity. It's called "it jihad," i-t jihad, whereas jihad generally is struggle, not necessarily violence or political, but it's internal struggle, like the struggle within everybody, each individual to be their best. But "it jihad" refers to culture and creativity, and obviously since modern times, when science leapfrogged in the West and did not among Muslims, the Muslim world has fallen behind in all aspects of creativity. Yet they remember that, and a revival of that could help divert some of the energy from revenge against the West to doing things better than the West, which they may be capable of doing. They did it before. And Turkey is the country where this kind of activity could be encouraged, so that could be a fun assignment, but I don't foresee it.

Certainly not Spain, because we've just designated an ambassador to Spain, but the Senate's on vacation now, and he'll be approved no doubt, because he's a person friend of the Clintons and knows [President Barack] Obama very well.

Espino

What was it like going back to Northridge and going back to a life without the household help and the fancy dinners and that kind of thing?

Nava

It was strange. It was strange, but we had been kind of conditioning ourselves to it, and that helped a lot. When you come home, it doesn't take you long to get back into your routine. It doesn't take you long, and I didn't miss the other stuff. It was make believe, and people were nice to you because you were ambassador. Maybe they really wanted to be nice to you, but there was always the view in your mind, they have to be nice to me, and so it was in a sense encouraging to come back to people who could relate to you naturally.

Espino

And what were your goals after that, after you returned?

Nava

I went into semi-retirement. I went into semi-retirement, because just before I left the embassy a member of the [California] State University Board of Trustees called me and he said, "Julian, why don't you throw your hat in the ring for the presidency of Cal State Fullerton?" "Hey, yeah, that's interesting. What's the score?" He said, "Well, the president is retiring, and I think you would have a good crack at it, especially since you lost by such a narrow margin, eight-to-seven in Cal State L.A.." So I told him, "Well, I'd be interested in going, but you know," I said, "Cal State L.A. still hurts, and I would throw my hat for Fullerton if you could ask around the trustees and see whether or not there would be a disposition towards it, because I don't want to be turned down again." And that was, in retrospect, a mistake, pride and hurt over L.A. I should have simply said, "Okay, let's go for it."

And the trustees at Fullerton selected a black woman to be the president of Fullerton, and so at that point I said, "Oh, to hell with the system. I'm going to take early retirement," by which you can teach for full pay six months and then get retirement the second six months, whatever you're qualified for, although your qualifications do not increase after that point. So full pay

for six months and then retirement pay after that. So we did the numbers and we figured, oh, that would be very nice, and I could during this other six months start to do interesting things, like ultimately produce documentaries, which is what I started to do, first one the Basque documentary, because it's like writing a book. You have to find out about all kinds of things.

But then about four years into that program, the trustees changed the rules and said you could be in that program only so many years, and I argued on the phone with a guy saying, "It's not right. It's not fair. There was no limit placed on it when I joined the program. If the trustees now want to limit it, it should apply to new people." He said, "I agree with you," and he was a powerful representative of the California State Employees Association, and he would not go to bat for me. He said, "Aw, Julian, we've got other fish to fry, and I don't think we would win anyway, and it might take years to win a lawsuit, and they've got deep pockets you know, and you don't." So that ended and then I just went on complete year-long retirement, which I'm on now. But we would have been far more comfortable with full salary for six months and then retirement, not the two at the same time.

So I left the system with some sadness because of that, and the trustees were not thinking of me when they changed the rule, they were just thinking that this is a good thing to do. That's all there is to it. There might have been--well, there was, an untold number of people negatively affected as I was by that new rule. So, for example, Rudy Acuña is under the new rules. So I started doing other things, mostly the documentaries, which were all really out of my pocket until I got money from sponsors. The first sponsor turned out to be the government of the Basque autonomy, and they funded the documentary on the Basques, a very modest salary on it, but expenses were covered and so forth, and it was a Hollywood-quality documentary, because the cameraman and the director

were Hollywood-quality people, and so that cost, what, about \$225,000. At that time that was like three times that much now.

And then the Cuba documentary was funded by a very prosperous Japanese American who lived in the Hawaiian Islands, introduced to me by a nephew, the son of an older brother who had gone to live in Japan to teach English, ultimately married very well in Japan and was now living--he and his Japanese wife were living in southern California, and he introduced me to the Japanese guy, who needed counseling on setting up a foundation as a way of keeping more of his money and being able to use it in a way that he wanted to. Like I just got this book on [Lee] Iacocca, and he has an Iacocca Foundation through which he does a lot of things that he thinks are good to do with money that otherwise would have gone to the Feds, to IRS. So we met for lunch at that restaurant in North Hollywood at that hotel, I think it's called the Universal, and I just gave him a lot of general information that probably he would have, too, about how to set up a foundation, the limitations and the capabilities and stuff like that, and we spoke for about half an hour over a nice dinner, and then over dessert he said, "Well, tell me, Julian, what are you doing? I understand you're retired."

So I told him, "Well, I'm starting to produce documentaries." "Really?" This guy was very wealthy. "What are you working on?" I said, "A documentary on Cuba." "Cuba? But that's a communist government." I said, "Yeah, but it's a very particular kind of government. They have set up a socialist society, and they claim that it's better for Cubans than our capitalist society, and in some respects they've done very well, especially in terms of education and health coverage." And he said, "But I don't understand why." I said, "Well, I think Americans should understand Cuba better. Then our policy towards Cuba could make more sense than it does right now." And I said, "That would be the object for the documentary,

help explain Cuba, good points, bad points, to the American public." "Yeah, okay, I'll go along with that," because here he was trying to set up a foundation for roughly the same kind of things.

And then he asked me a question I didn't expect. I didn't expect that subject at all to come up, and he said, "Well, how much is it going to cost you?" Boom. I hadn't thought of that. I hadn't expected the question. So I sipped a little bit of coffee while I thought, and I said, "Well, we've already done some work on our own with the previous trip, scouting, and we figured out how to do it in a way that would keep costs controlled." I said, "And so now I think that we could finish the whole thing with \$75,000 to \$80,000." The Basque video had cost two and a quarter, \$225,000, and we spent all of it. And I said, "Cuba is nearby and after our scouting trip we've got a handle on it." And I said, "And we have permission from the government in Cuba to shoot there." So he said, "Okay." He said, "Let me have your bank transfer number and when I get back to the islands I'll have my secretary wire you the money." And that's what happened. He went back and a week later I checked in with my bank, and there was \$75,000, and that's what we used, and we finished it.

Towards the end we were kind of cramped and so we edited the Cuba video in a professional studio by renting it and the labor of a young technician at night when it was closed down. So we went to work at nine o'clock at night and then worked till seven o'clock in the morning several nights, on four or five nights, and the young guy worked for less because he was hungry and he wanted the professional credits, because during the day he was just a technician there, but he knew all the equipment. Now, since then that room, which was as large as my office with all this stuff, now you could edit that practically on your laptop, practically, not quite but practically, certainly in my office. So we finished the whole damn thing and it's pretty good. Have you seen it?

Espino

I have it. I haven't seen it. I have to see it and I have to send it back to you. Yes, you did lend me a copy.

Nava

You can keep it. It was a VHS.

Espino

No, it was a DVD. Now I'm going to pause it for a second.

Espino

Okay, we're back. Well, you mentioned a few minutes ago your feelings towards Cal State when you were asked to become president of Cal State Northridge, but we never really talked about what happened with--I don't know if you were--

Nava

You mean L.A.?

Espino

Yes, Cal State L.A. Right, Cal State Los Angeles. What is the story behind those feelings?

Nava

Well, I decided to not run for reelection again for a fourth term.

Espino

The Board of Education?

Nava

The Board of Education. I figured three terms on the Board of Education, twelve years is enough, plus the anti-busing frenzy had really taken over much of public life, and at the same time the public had voted to realign the election of board members by single-member districts, so there would be seven board

members each elected from their own district, and I didn't like that. To begin with, it would strand me from most of the Mexican American population. There are pockets in San Fernando and in Canoga Park, but that would be it anyway.

I gave--I'm trying to remember clearly now--I gave someone on the Board of Trustees an indication that I would be interested in a presidency, and he thought it was a great idea, and Chancellor Glen Dumke, D-u-m-k-e, called me, because at that time again once must remember, a Board of Education member was a heavyweight elected countywide. No one other than the Secretary of State or the governor or a senator was elected by more people. So Dumke called, and Dumke is a professional historian, was a professional historian. So there was that kind of bond as well, and very sympathetic to Mexican American things as it turns out. I had an image of that, because he'd been present at some California historical meetings and expressed views that I thought were good.

Anyway, he called and he said, "Julian, I think I have the votes for you for Cal State--oh, god, what is it, on the way to Pomona? There's a campus there.

Espino

Not Fullerton?

Nava

No, no, on the way to Pomona, near Kellogg Hill. You come over the hill and then down.

Espino

There's another Cal State?

Nava

Yes. There's a Cal State there, good-sized, specializing in agriculture to some extent, farming, and technological things. Cal State Pomona, and famous because it had the best collection of Arabian horses in the United States there. And he

said, "I think I can swing it there. Why don't you go over and have a look?" So I took Pat. I don't remember if we took the kids; I don't think so. We didn't want to get expectations of it. Pat and I went over and looked at the campus, and we learned that on that campus there was a home for the president. Some of the state campuses have that, and some of the U-CALs do, too. I picked up a copy of their catalog and it was familiar.

And we drove around the communities, around the campus there, Laverne, San Dimas, and I knew Claremont, Pomona, places, but then we realized forget that, there's a residence on the campus. But we looked at homes, too, because we figured that it might not be a good environment for the kids to grow up on the campus presidency residence. So what concerned us about Pomona was the terrible smog. Pomona has terrible smog. That whole San Bernardino Valley has terrible smog, much less now, then very bad, because the winds come in from Santa Monica blowing all the L.A. junk towards San Bernardino, where it hits a horseshoe comprised of the mountains, so it was one of the worst places for smog, and we were very worried about the children. So I expressed my concerns to the chancellor and he said, "Well," he said, "Cal State L.A. is opening up, too. Would that interest you?" "Oh, that an awful lot more."

So I put my hat in the ring for Cal State L.A. Jerry Brown was governor at the time, and the governor is a member of the trustee board, like one or two other constitutional officers. So there was a member of the state board, his name is coming back to me, the same guy who called me years later about Cal State Fullerton. He's a very powerful California official now, a real heavy, I forget what it is but very powerful. Anyway, he said, "Julian, I've been counting votes, and I think we can swing it." Now, Wilson Riles had been recently elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and I had supported Wilson Riles in his campaign, and he knew it and he valued it.

"Let me know, Julian, if there's ever anything I can do for you." "Okay, Wilson."

And the vote came up. Now, there was a member on the trustees, Claudia Hampton, a black lady who was an employee in L.A. Unified School District, and she was a member of a department that related the school district to the social environment of minority groups in the district, and she had a number of bright, young Mexican American employees working under her. Claudia was a good person. I had a personal relationship with her, and she gave me to understand that it was a good idea. So what with Wilson Riles and Claudia and Jerry Brown--oh, another question. One was ["Wallie"] Albertson, she's now a widow of the Albertson grocery-store chain, a very liberal Jew. I went to visit her at her home and while she did not make a commitment, she seemed to be very positively inclined. Little did I know at the time that she was already committed to Wilson Riles, but she didn't tell me that. I wish she had.

Anyway, it looked like we had the votes, but at the last minute Claudia Hampton abstained with the argument, she later explained to me, that since I was on the school board and she was an employee, blah, blah, blah, but she had not mentioned abstaining when I spoke to her before, counting votes. She abstained. Wilson Riles did not show up because of, quote, unquote, "pressing state business." And I lost eight to seven, eight to seven. The president of the trustees also abstained, because apparently the practice was that the president did not vote unless there was a tie, like in the U.S. Senate, and he let it be known that if there had been a tie he would have voted for me. So I lost Cal State L.A. eight to seven, and Jerry Brown who was there at the meeting in Long Beach, was astounded, mostly because Wilson Riles did not show up, and he knew how to count.

So Wilson Riles not being there, the governor and one or two other board members and I met after the designation of James

Rosser, and the group decided, "Julian, let's try for Fresno." "Okay. I know nothing about Fresno, but it's a campus where there are a large number of Hispanics." So I went through the routine of interviewing with a committee from Fresno, and my term in office was just ending, so either it had just ended or it was about to end on the board, and the group was cordial but not friendly, and I sensed that right away. I learned later that the committee had recommended someone else for the presidency of Fresno, and one member of the committee called me at the campus and he said, "Professor, I feel compelled out of decency to call and tell you what happened." He said, "Enough members of the committee, though they thought very highly of your presentation and your qualifications, said in the committee, 'Anybody but Nava.' And I was astounded, because they all said, 'He's qualified, he's been on the school board and blah, blah, blah, and he's published several books on Mexican Americans, and he's lived abroad.'" I had more qualifications, far more than the guy that they selected, who came from, I don't know, Iowa or somewhere. And he said, "I've never seen such unprofessional attitudes, and that's why I'm calling you and I'm asking you to keep our conversation confidential." I said, "I will, okay."

So that's what happened with Fresno, and within three or four months I got that telephone call while I was mowing the lawn. And James Rosser has been generally disliked at Cal State L.A. He's a black, black-black, and, for example, one guy called about three weeks ago before I went to Spain and he said, "I haven't talked to you, Julian, for a year and a half or two. I just called to say hello. How's everything going?" Then we talked about the trip to Spain. "And how's everything at Cal State?" He said, "Oh, pretty much the same." I said, "James is still there?" He said, "Yeah, he's going to be there forever. He's been there, well, from '79, that's how long, '79, '89, '99. He's been there almost thirty years." And we both agreed no one should be a president of a campus that long, not even really

half that long. Fifteen years is plenty for a campus president, and he's there thirty.

And this guy had told me in previous conversations, "James Rosser has been looking for another presidency for the last three or four years," and that conversation took place about five years ago. "He wants a presidency at a historically black university for the rest of his career." Now, campus presidents in our system get, oh, about \$225,000 a year. Yours get more, don't they? Yes.

Espino

UC?

Nava

Yes. Yes, they do. Ours get just a little bit less, about 200,000 or 225,000. And he's been there that long, so he's not concerned about his retirement, okay, and plus he gets retirement, well, 100 percent of his salary. After twenty, twenty-five years you get 100 percent of your salary. This guy had called a couple of times before, trying to ask for advice to a political strategy, because the Mexican American group at Cal State L.A. had tried without success to get permission from Rosser to put up a life-sized monument of César Chávez. There is a life-sized monument of César Chávez at our local Cal State San Marcos, and it's in a very prominent position, and there he is just standing there, life size of César. I remember not long after we got here we were there for the dedication, and, quote, unquote, James Rosser told this group, "There will be no statue of César Chávez on my campus as long as I'm here. We can designate a lecture hall after him or whatever. No statue of César Chávez," knowing full well, this guy said, there were people that would donate the money for the statue. It would not be a Cal State expense.

The first time he tried, he said no on the basis that, "We don't have the money." And two or three years later they tried

again, saying, "We've raised the money." And so that's James Rosser. And this guy said a couple of times the faculty senate has been on the verge of a vote of no confidence, but they were given to understand, this guy said, by people connected to the trustees, that if you do that you're going to be on the shit list. "Cal State L.A. is going to be on the shit list; nobody does that to one of our presidents." So Rosser is still there, and it's now just about thirty years. Can you imagine? And so he was already, I don't know, forty or something, forty-five when he got the job, maybe forty.

Espino

Well, what about your friend who was originally going to support you? Did you ever have a conversation with him?

Nava

Yes. Wilson Riles called very apologetic and he said, "Julian, I am so sorry. I'm so sorry, but I just couldn't get away from Sacramento. If there is anything I can ever do for you, please let me know." So all I could say was, "Well, Wilson, I appreciate your sentiments. Thank you so much for calling." Click. All he had to do was be there for ten minutes. But that conduct of his and Claudia Hampton's conduct was in keeping with the thrust that Chicano leadership had at that time, or that blacks were out to get whatever they could and that they would not countenance any rivalry or competition from Mexican Americans.

Espino

Do you think that's what it was about?

Nava

Yes, oh, I know it was about that, yes, from conversations. The state Senator [Art] Torres, what's his name?

Espino

Art?

Nava

Art Torres, I think I might have mentioned, gave a lecture at that big black church in Watts. They have people come in. It's kind of like half of a sermon, and he told them what happened at Cal State L.A. and said, "The conduct regarding this appointment at a Mexican American campus," he said, "has been taken note of among Mexican American leadership everywhere and will no doubt have an effect on our relations, and so your leadership has failed, because we have backed you in everything," and went on to talk in detail about, "We've supported Tom Bradley four times." I think he was elected four times. "And politely but effectively kept any prominent Mexican American from running against Tom. And, frankly, we expected a return of that courtesy, the courtesy of a return of that favor." Art told me that. Art told me that, and he said the audience, packed, because he was already whatever he was in Sacramento, they just sat there in silence. But he said, "Julian, I just had to do it. I had to do it."

And after that there was in a number of different ways that were not obvious, but, well, were but not major, a diminution of contacts between the two groups, and that holds on down to the present, not because of that incident, but once relations are broken it's hard to reestablish them, because at first it was good feelings about the Civil Rights struggle and cooperation for running for the Board of Education and other things.

Espino

So you look at it as disloyal--well, not disloyalty but--

Nava

Ingratitude and selfishness, and I can understand it. This was the first time the American public was showing interest in righting the wrongs by appointing a lot of people that were not qualified but they were black, and if a black and a Chicano applied for the same position, the black got it. And you know

what? That's still true, and then for other reasons all the more so now with Obama in the White House, because we have to make up for two centuries of slavery.

Espino

Well, when you look at Bradley's administration it seems that he did appoint Mexican Americans.

Nava

Yes.

Espino

He wasn't just looking at--

Nava

He did. Bradley was a true leader, and that helps explain why Chicanos supported Tom Bradley, and Tom Bradley wanted me president of Cal State L.A. But he was not on the trustees and he had no influence on little Claudia Hampton and Wilson Riles in Sacramento, so it was not in his power to influence it. And probably, I'm guessing, he was simply told politely by other black leaders, "Keep cool, keep quiet. This is not your bag. Keep cool, keep quiet." And he said, in effect, virtually the same thing to me. He said, "There was nothing I could do about it, Julian," and you could interpret that a number of ways. But he could have said, "I called," any number of things, "but there was just nothing I could do about it."

And now, of course, a lot of things have changed. Mexican Americans far outnumber blacks in L.A., and the sparkplug for the "Stop Nava" movement was fellow school board member Diane Watson, who is still a member of Congress. She left the school board to run for Congress and was elected, and remember I think I told you earlier, she would talk on for five minutes and you'd wonder what she said, and I think she developed a grudge against me, because every now and then I would ask her, "Diane, what do you mean?" [growls] Because

she felt very important for being a board member, and for me it was just, what else is new? Let's get this thing done. And Claudia Hampton told me--she called and asked to speak to me. I went to her office after the fateful vote, and she said, "Julian, Diane came to see me and she told me no way could I vote for you and that if I did she would personally assault me." And Diane Watson is a tall person, very tall person, and Claudia is not, maybe five-six, and so Claudia said, "The best I could do for you was to abstain."

But when Claudia Hampton died I heard about it, and I got an invitation to attend, and I told Pat, I said, "I feel like going." "Julian, how could you go and attend Claudia's--" because Pat had met her on several occasions--"after what she did?" And I told Patty, "Patty, I don't want to go either, but you know what? I'm curious to see if she really is dead." I think that gives you a feeling of my sentiments.

Espino

But she did give you some information in the end.

Nava

She gave me some valuable information, but I had worked with her closely for twelve years on the school board. I mean, we were buddies, Claudia. I mean, that was really, that's like, "Et tu, Brutus?"

Espino

I see. Well, what do you think Diane Watson--what was her rationale against you?

Nava

Well, she developed a resentment that I often differed in opinion with her, and she was the kind of a black who was supposed to be right because she was black, and I had the gall to treat her as an individual. When she made sense, fine, and when she didn't make sense, fine, I would say so, but she was

very sensitive about that. Other board members realized the same thing, too. It wasn't just me. And it was also the black for black, black for black.

Espino

Is there any one specific issue that stands out? Because last time we talked you mentioned how you were on the same side regarding the school integration, but what was it that you disagreed about?

Nava

We pretty much agreed on--well, I take it back. She knew that black power in local schools would be lost, but she felt compelled to argue for integration, no matter, and I was not opposed to integration, but I argued for voluntary integration in a number of other activities, because the school board had just purchased, built a television station, and the school board did proceed in time to use it in a number of ways through programming to help bring greater understanding. And so she developed a personal animosity to me. I mean, there are people that you don't like for a number of reasons. Yes, so that had a profound effect on my professional career, to put it that way. Because then Fresno fell through and Fullerton fell through, and so I figured, if the trustees won't appoint a former U.S. ambassador to Fullerton, I'm never going to get--because it was the same trustees. There had been no change. I said, then they're just not going to appoint me.

But sometimes you can kind of want to be away from someone that you're embarrassed about, because it embarrasses you, and the presidents and the trustees have to work together rather closely, so I could in a way understand why. Of course, in the case of Fresno I did not come before the trustees, but in the case of Fullerton this fellow made certain that my name came before them, because I was a Mexico-U.S. ambassador. So, what was his name, it's coming back, he said, "Julian," he said, "this board of trustees, you just can't expect anything

from them. If they won't appoint you now," referring to being as U.S. ambassador--I think it probably would have looked pretty good for the local community that their new campus president was a U.S. ambassador.

So those have been some of the ups and downs in the career. So here locally I'm involved--oh, I've got to return this call--with Mexican American groups. There's a group that promotes graduation and attendance to colleges, and they just put me on as an honorary board member. It's called Nosotros, and it's rather active, so I've got to call this guy. His name is Joaquin [Aganza], very active, very good professional school psychologist. I got his message yesterday and I'd better call today.

Espino

Are you still teaching?

Nava

No, oh, no. I taught two semesters at Cal State San Marcos. They asked me to through my daughter, and I gave one course on Mexican history, and god, what's this guy's name? I've got it here. And then the next year a seminar on Latin America, and both of them were fun. Both of them were fun, and I would have taught again but--here it is, Joaquin Aganza. I'll call him. But the budget crunch hit, and the chairman said, "Oh, Julian, we hate not to be able to keep you on to give another course," because you have a crop. You can give a course on Mexico once every other year, Latin America once every other year. It's always new students, and the students at Cal State San Marcos evaluate every instructor, and he said, "You got great marks. You got great marks, but we're letting some new faculty go that don't have tenure yet, that have only been teaching here one or two years. We're letting them go and simply increasing class size to meet our budget."

But I found that giving the course, especially the second course maybe, was getting tiring. It was just getting tiring, and so I don't know whether I would teach again, because I guess the plain fact of the matter is your battery starts to run low, or you run out of gas or however you want to put it. But giving talks or lectures every now and then, that's different. So I've taught a long time, and it's been very satisfying, and every now and then I run across a former student who has an M.A. or a Ph.D.

Espino

Well, looking back on these several sessions that we've had, is there anything that we didn't talk about that you'd like to discuss now, or something that maybe came to mind?

Nava

Well, nothing seems to come to mind. I'm very much aware, because I try to keep track of things, that a tremendous amount of progress has been made, and young people today, young Mexican American people today simply can't imagine how hard it was twenty-five or thirty years ago in the generation of the Rudy Acuña's, that were battling up against obvious discrimination, but it was a different kind than that of blacks. It was less obvious and therefore more difficult to cope with. But we've been a polite or gentle minority group in comparison to blacks, who are very Gringo. They shout. They pound on the desk and they say, "Help me, or we'll get you. We've burned down half a dozen cities in the country, or parts of them, our own ghettos," and Mexican Americans don't do that, so we are not a threatening group like blacks are, and there isn't a feeling of guilt towards us as there is towards blacks. And we have never been slaves, so we have a harder task to open up opportunities so that our young people can hope to develop their abilities.

But again, because we haven't suffered like blacks, there isn't the same fire in the belly among Mexican American youth, and

that is, I think, unfortunate. The blacks tell each other about slavery and get them riled up and mad, and that doesn't happen amongst us. And yet more and more are going on as far as college attendance measures progress, but I get regularly the monthly "Hispanic American" or, say, the "Hispanic Business Report." It's a magazine, slick cover, excellent articles, and many of them analytical articles showing the number of corporations or self-employed Mexican businesses, and we are integrating into society like the Swedes, the Irish, the Italians have. The Jews are a special group apart, like the Asians are a separate group apart, and there isn't the same feeling of intensity and struggle amongst our group, in great part for the absence of those things that blacks have suffered and the fact that enough progress has been made that you figure you can do it. You don't have to use affirmative action.

But in my generation there was a profound resentment against affirmative action, because it was seen purely as white-black and not something dedicated towards righting the wrongs or opening opportunities for Hispanics. But things have changed substantially, and there is progress in the group. And the only negative thing on the horizon, cloud or storms, is the question of immigration, which obscures much of the progress. It obscures it and endangers it, because the resentment against undocumented workers is carried over to Mexican Americans, because how can you tell the difference? Undocumented are running around in good cars, too, and they use jeans, and the gals use the hairdresses of everybody else, and yet they look at me and how can they tell me from an undocumented person? So it's a unique situation. Asians know they're set aside, Jews set themselves aside, so it's a different dynamic for each of the major groups, and one can only applaud the growth of society enough to elect a Barack Obama, because that's good for everybody. That's pretty much it.

Espino

Well, thank you. I think that's pretty much it for me as well. I appreciate your time and your willingness to discuss openly, and it's been a wonderful experience.

Nava

Well, if it helps, I think if it helps increase the fund of available information and perceptions, it's to the good, because you never can tell when someone comes along that reads some of this stuff and feels enthused.

Espino

And also informed. This document, once it's transcribed, it's going to live on for years to come, so it's a very important oral history.

Nava

What kind of a chancellor does UCLA have now?

Espino

I'm going to turn off the tape recorder now.