Interview of Irene Tovar
UCLA Library, Center for Oral History Research, University of California, Los Angeles Interview of Irene Tovar

Transcript

SESSION ONE (October 12, 2011)

ESPINO:

This is Virginia Espino, and I'm interviewing Irene Tovar at her home in Mission Hills on October 12, 2011. We're going to start today, but first of all, thank you so much for taking the time out of your busy schedule to interview with me. I really appreciate it. I'd like to start with what you know about your early family history. (Interruption)

00:00:35

ESPINO:

Can you tell me what you know about your early family history?

TOVAR:

Well, the earliest I remember□first of all, maybe even before what was told to me, maybe that's where we could start.

ESPINO:

Sure.

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TOVAR:

My mother was born in Salamanca, Guanajuato. She came to the United States in 1910 as a result of the Mexican Revolution. She was a little girl. What happened is my grandfather was a merchant in Salamanca and had a store. He was basically middle class, they were middle class, and he had good relationship because had been a businessman. The mayor told him that they had just gotten information that the Federales were going to be coming at midnight because that's how they would take the soldiers for the Federales. They were forced into the military. My mother had three brothers that qualified for that age, and had one that was young. So literally what my grandfather did is he told his wife, my grandmother, "Leave right now. Leave right now and take the older boys," and so that's exactly how she ended up coming to the United States. They crossed El Paso, and they were told, "Stay there. We will join you." So soon after that, the rest of the family moved into El Paso, and they stayed for a while in El Paso. Then they moved to San Antonio, where that became their base, their home base. I still have relatives in San Antonio. We visit them every now and then. So that's the migration of my mother. It's interesting because when my mother got her Green Card, she had to prove that she had never gone back to Mexico, and so they had to go back to the archives in El Paso, and there they found her name that she had crossed the border, what year, and how much they had paid. I think she told me they had paid somewhere around three, three pennies or something like that, for everybody who crossed the border, and that's how she got proof of her Green Card.

Now, my dad came very differently. My dad came after the revolution, so my father saw all of the revolution. That was so key because he shared that history with me, and that affected my life very, very much in terms of what he told me, the role, the conflict that occurred of the revolution and also to the role of the church. That also was very key in how he helped me perceive and see life and see struggles and the issue of justice. I think that was very monumental in our home because that was often discussed of the things my dad saw. He was from Zacatecas. My father was from the municipality that is called Jerez, Zacatecas, and he was in a little ranch. There's a little interesting part of it that one day I hope to research. There's a ranch called El Rancho de (Spanish phrase), and they don't know, it must have been that a long time ago there must have been someone who was an haciendero that had it, but my parents, my father, did not have that. But he somehow remembers a conversation, something that his grandfather told another haciendero, "You can have that land if you

will take care of my children," because for some reason which is not clear at all, something was happening to him and he had to leave. We don't know what that might have been. We've never found out, and that's one of the so-called mysteries, interesting things of it. So very quickly, that was my father's history. He came to the United States, not to El Paso but through Laredo, a different entry.

They met in California. From what I understand, my mother came on vacation. I'm not too clear on that. And that's where they met and they married. They were here in the Valley, in the San Fernando Valley, in the thirties, and they liked the Valley. It was agricultural. It was not like it is now. They liked it, and then somehow or other they moved to East L.A. They lived on a street called Michigan Avenue. That's where my dad was a store clerk. He worked for a man that eventually became my godfather, and he was interesting because he was a Mexican Indian. My godfather was a Mexican Indian and he wrote the language of his tribe in Mexico. I loved my godfather. He was just a wonderful human being. That's when my mother became pregnant, and so I was born in White Memorial Hospital, which is Lincoln Heights, and I was the first. Well, I was the first child that lived. I understand that my mother had another child, but the child died of pneumonia at one year of age. My mother found it sometimes difficult to talk about that, so I don't know too, too much about the child, but every now and then she would remember that child.

My sister was born in the County Hospital. My brother, still, obviously, my brother was born at home on Clover Street where there was the Casa Redonda that they used to say. Apparently it was some kind of related to railroad tracks or whatever, Casa Redonda, roundhouse, they called it. Then we moved. The things that I remember so much about living in Clover Street, besides me ending up around the age of three going to the hospital because I was born with rickets, and what happened□this is what my mother used to tell me, is that when she was pregnant she couldn't absorb calcium in her system. They even gave her a lot of shots, calcium shots. When I was born, they were not too sure whether I would be able to survive. They told my dad, "It's either your wife or the child that you have to make a choice if we have to make that decision." I told my dad that he was very lucky because he had me. (Laughs) I was born the day before his birthday, and, luckily, we both survived, my mom and I. My mom always used to have a hard labor, and every one of her childs was a hard labor for her, which tells you a little bit about Latina womens during that area and even up to the present, in terms of natal care and all that kind of stuff.

ESPINO:

But it was nice she was able to deliver in a hospital like White Memorial, which was a private hospital.

00:08:30

TOVAR:

Yes, that's right. I don't know how that happened. I never found out how it is that she went to White Memorial at all, because my sister, as I told you, was born in the County Hospital, and my brother was born at home on Clover. As a matter of fact, because my mother had such a hardship in delivery, they told her that the doctor recommended that she should abort, and my mother refused. She says, "Well, if you have that child, you're going to die."

And she says, "Well, I'll take that chance." And, look, my mother again survived. She was a fighter. She survived, and my brother's six-foot-tall, who ended up being a police officer, then a teacher, and now he's a businessman. So, you see, you can never tell. My mother said, "No way."

ESPINO:

Do you know the dynamics of her labor? Was it just very painful, or was it hours and hours, or do you know?

TOVAR:

Well, I think it was a combination of all of those things, all of them, because my mother tell us□and, of course, we don't remember as little children□that she carried a lot of fluid in her system, and then it was a matter of delivery. The details I don't know, but I know she used to say that it was very difficult for her to delivery. So it must have been not only physical, but chemically something must have happened in her system. It was very difficult. Then after that, as far as my siblings, we moved to Pacoima after an incident that we witnessed as little children. We lived on Clover Street, and it was interesting how that house was, because the front of the house faced the street, but the playground also faced the street. So it was like in the same line. And we were out playing, and I must have been around, again, maybe rather young, I would say three, four, something like that. My brother, my sister were also playing in the

background. All of a sudden, I do remember for whatever reason, I remember this young man in a Navy outfit, the white□you know how□

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ESPINO:

U.S. Navy.

00:12:26

TOVAR:

Yes, U.S. Navy. And a little while after that, there was a fight. Time-wise, as a child I don't remember. All of a sudden we heard the M.P.'s coming, and as soon as that happened, my mother dashes into the house. So the only thing I remember was the sounds, the sounds of someone hitting the M.P.'s car. The M.P.'s were hitting, and loudspeakers, according to my parents, saying very profound words, "Get out of here," whoever you hit, a serviceman. So we were traumatized as little children. My dad said, "I never want you to witness something like this. I never want you to see violence." So we moved to the Valley, where it was going to be peaceful and very agricultural-like, and that's when we came to Pacoima. Again, that's why we sometime underestimate children. I remember very clearly crossing the railroad tracks into Pacoima, and I remember I was sitting in front between my mom and my dad as we crossed the railroad tracks to Pacoima, and by then I guess I must have been a little bit older, and I remember the house that we moved into on Penny (phonetic) Street, very poor neighborhood. But in those days, Latinos and minorities, that was where we were allowed to live, so that I was raised with my neighbors being African American, Filipinos, because, as you know, Asians were not allowed to marry. They would have to go a hundred miles from California if they were going to marry. They were not allowed. But my next-door neighbor was Filipino and his wife was Chicana, was a Mexicana, and that's where we learned how to make steamed rice, or my mother learned how to make steamed rice. Across kitty-cornered from us was an African American family, and the rest were the majority was Latinos because we had a long history in the Valley, I mean hundreds of years.

Also, too, it was a beautiful valley because I remember, and now I'm much older, obviously, as a young woman I remember the smell of the Valley, because foothill, it was gardeners. It was flowers and it was olive trees and it was agriculture, and so you could smell the blossoms of the oranges and you could see the flowers. It was so beautiful, because if you looked at foothill, which was like a little mountain, it was like a beautiful carpet of different colors because of the flowers. That was Japanese and Filipinos who mainly had the nurseries. So it really made a world of difference because I was really not that isolated from racial differences, and my father and mother were people who believed very much in ser humano. The ser humano in Spanish, as you know, is a very, very strong word. It talks about the dignity of the human being. It talks about saving and protecting the dignity of being human. My fathers, both of them used to say whatever taints that value of the ser humano, you have to do something about it. I think that led to my activism because that was key. At ser humano you protected its dignity, its rights. It was not only a governmental right or something that's given to you but also, too, it's a spiritual right that you were a child of god and therefore you do not destroy what god created. So that was a very key principle in how my parents dealt with other people.

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ESPINO:

That's really interesting, because typically in many Latino families, Mexican, Mexican American families, there's racism within those groups, or bias, maybe not racism, because the power isn't there.

TOVAR:

You have to have power to be racist.

ESPINO:

But the bias towards African Americans or Asians. You don't remember your parents having any kinds of sentiments towards their neighbors at that time?

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TOVAR:

No, not at all. As a matter of fact, we were very good. I believe their names were the Johnsons. I think that was it. He worked at some kind of a company that made some kind of a pastry that had meat inside of it or had sweet inside of it, and he would share that with us. Then my mom would make enchiladas or some Mexican food and share with them. I never remember my parents saying anything negative, and I think it was basically because of their experience with the revolution. That was another key element in our house, that my dad would always make us aware of how Mexico was at that time under Porfirio Diaz, and that people were los peones; they were nothing. I mean, they didn't know anything. My grandfather, my father's father had been an administrador. An administrador is sort of one that's sort of the like the manager of a hacienda, and usually they're stereotyped as being the cruel, abusive administrador. But my grandfather, when the revolution occurred, they wanted to get rid and kill administradors and all that kind of stuff. The hacienderos, the owners of those haciendas, usually lived in Europe, so that really they protected my grandfather. The peones protected my grandfather. My grandfather, according to my father, was a very gentle and kind man. He was also, in today's term, my grandfather was a veterinarian. He used to cure the horses, and he used to know how to train horses in Mexico. So that even played a role in the revolution because Salamanca was a center of where the forces came on both sides, from the north and the south. So what would happen is either the revolutionaries would leave their tired horses there and would take the fresh horses that had been trained, not by asking permission; they would just take it. Then the Federales would come and do the same thing.

So that area was crisscrossed by both sections, you had to know who represented what, because sometimes you didn't know. Interesting, though, the way you usually could tell who were Federales is that the Federales would shave the heads of their soldiers, so that you had to know who was distinguished between the revolutionaries and the Federales. So that was something that my dad would often tell us about, the little details you often don't find in history because you lived it. My dad, because he was in that place, he got to meet□not hear about it, but actually knew the Federales on all sides personally. By personally, I mean that he wasn't buddy-buddy, but he interacted with them because of the horses, that they would leave their old horses and take them. As a matter of fact, my dad tells a very endearing story about the revolution. He had his horse, which he loved his horse. In the revolution, they took his horse when they were leaving the old ones there. He cried for his horse, so he decided to go and ask for his horse. He decided to go and ask for his horse, so he went just where the revolutionaries, Pancho Villa's forces, and he went as a little boy and he asked the general, the highest-level person there, that he wanted his horse, and "No, muchacho, (Spanish phrase)." And he cried, "Por favor," and he pleaded with them, Por favor," and finally, I guess the general was kind enough and he said, "Okay. Okay, muchacho. (Spanish phrase)." (Interruption)

ESPINO:

Okay. We're back.

TOVAR:

So finally, he felt sorry, I guess, for my father because he was crying for his horse. He says, "(Spanish phrases.)" Then my father, who's always been able to whistle like I wanted to learn how to whistle, whistled, and when he whistled, the horse came to him. So that was how he got his horse back.

ESPINO:

I'm surprised he had the courage to□I mean, who knows what the truth. But the stories of the abuses, even of the revolutionaries.

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TOVAR:

Yes. Oh, let me tell you. We have to look at history and revolutions very, very, very with the ugliness and the beauty of the justice of why the battle. But my father used to say that he would never want another revolution. He said not only because it's brother against brother, but also, too, and what it did to the families, it tore them apart, but the fear of always being in danger. One of the things along those lines, remember this was a revolution, so there are many stories that you sometimes can't believe it happened to one human

individual. Now, my father and his older brother used to trade goods, and the way my father described is that somehow they were in some kind of a ravine or there was like a mountain, and you had to carry, in effect, papers from both sides, because you never knew which side would let you cross or not, and you better have the right papers. So one day they were trading their goods and they were caught by one of the factions, and they didn't know what factions it was. So my father says, "We prayed that we were going to hand them the right documents, but we didn't know, because if we handed the wrong documents, we would be killed on the spot, or if we didn't."

So the way it looks, they must have given the wrong documents because they were about to be hung, literally to be hung, and they had the noose. My father was a little boy, a young boy. At that time child labor was in existence. So what happened is that something happened. My dad says, "God must have been on our side," because what happened is that all of a sudden someone comes in and says something is happening and they have to move. That's what saved, again, my dad's life and my uncle's life. But it was constant fear, constant that your life was in jeopardy. We sometimes don't understand it because we're so used to being in our home, being protected, anything could happen. On my mother's side, this is before the revolution, my grandfather had sisters, and I believe three or four of them became nuns. During the revolution, the revolutionarios took them, abducted them, and we never heard from them again. So the revolutionaries who were fighting for justice and land and peace, among them were people who had other alternatives and they abused that, and they did so. I want us to look at the revolution. The ideals were beautiful and the goals to be obtained were great, but in the process, all revolutions, even the French revolutions, remember, there was abuse by the very people who wanted the freedom not to be serfs. People, innocent people, were killed. But even in the establishment of the Third Reich, as you know, there were the three establishments that were in France that happened. A lot of good things happen, a lot of justice happened, and, unfortunately, it needed that. (Interruption)

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ESPINO:

Okay. We're back again.

00:24:53

TOVAR:

And we have to keep that in mind, that revolutions, the nobleness, the ideals, with it comes some things that are unjust. What a dichotomy, huh? You're fighting for justice and yet great injustices happen, even those that are pushing for the revolution. So those were lessons that my parents and my father used to discuss and talk to us and says, "I hope there's never a revolution if there are ways of peacefully resolving issues or resolving battles." I think that also helped me during the time that I was very active in the Anti-War Movement, because I used to picket. But I had a rule, and I was very proud of it, and that is that none of my picketers□when I was given a group of picketers, I made it very clear, "You will not get into any kind of confrontation," no matter how provoking it was. Because the police were very provoking. They literally got in your face, and they put the camera right in your face. I said, "The rule is, six feet apart. You don't obstruct entrances or exits." Not because I was afraid; I didn't want to hurt anyone that I was responsible for. The second thing I used to tell them is I said, "Do you want to give ammunition to the opposition? The best thing you can do for them is that you break a law or that you confront them or that you call them this or that." Not that I didn't feel like calling them that, but I'm very proud to say that I never, never had any of my picketers get into any kind of confrontation, physical, because I saw the physical confrontation, and they were ugly.

I got to see during the Anti-War Movement the police who literally cut□I saw the bone of a skull. I saw the blood. I saw those things that really reminded me of what my mother and father used to tell me. Well, mostly my father, because my father lived through it. My mother left at the beginning of it. So it had a great imprint on his life and how he saw things.

ESPINO:

And he still supported the revolutionary government?

TOVAR:

Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

ESPINO:

Even despite the fact□

TOVAR:

You had Porfirio. You had thirty years of slavery where it's almost equivalent in percentage what is happening in this country. Only 2 percent own the rest of the country land-wise. The peone was a slave. They call him peone, but in effect he was a slave. He had to live in the hacienda. He didn't own any property. He worked for the haciendero. He purchased things from the store of the haciendero. He got himself into credit, because he didn't earn enough money. So he was like□what is the word?

ESPINO:

Indentured?

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TOVAR:

Yes, indentured. Worse than that, because he didn't have a vote. Then to top it off, this is where my father, even though he was a Catholic and a god-fearing man, was very critical of the church, because the church was part of the□almost like in France, the Third Estate. Remember the church in France worked with the monarchy and the landlords and controlled France, and therefore there was nothing but serfs. The same thing happened here. The church was part of the establishment. I remember my dad telling that if a peone stole something or took something and then confessed it to the priest, the priest would tell the haciendero, and then they'd put him in prison. So it was a very harsh dark time, and that was during that Porfirio Diaz time.

People don't up-rise just for any reason. You don't start a revolution just whether how it goes, that may be questioned, but you don't have an uprising just because people decide that they're going to protest for the sake of it. What did they have to lose? That's what my father said. They had nothing to lose. In some cases, some of them thought that death would be better than what conditions they were living in. So we've got to understand also to what motivates people to enter into a revolution, a bloody revolution. It was not a sophisticated exchange-of-words revolution. It was a battle. People died, injustices occurred, women were raped on both sides. The Federales were no goody-goody good too. They had control of that country. Remember in Mexico, Portfirio invited the foreign nations to take the resources of Mexico. That's where the oil drilling and all the□some of our relatives have non-Latino or Spanish surnames because the French came, the Germans came. They came and they made good of the resources that were in Mexico and took them out, and they didn't put anything back into Mexico. That in itself is very important, and my father taught us that. So in some ways, my dad was talking to us about rights, political issues, the history of a nation, the real, not having read about it, but lived it through. So you didn't romanticize the revolution. You supported it because it did deal with human rights, ser humano against the concept of ser humano. But in effect, my dad helped me understand the reality of revolutions. That's what I think got me to see history not as data or dates or anything, but really lives, the struggle of people, that that's really the story, that's really history.

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ESPINO:

Did you like history in school, when you were in grade school?

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TOVAR:

Oh, I loved it. Oh, that was my easiest subject, I mean. I loved it because I had the perception that I was not reading about dead people; to me they were alive and they were taking positions. I remember when we talked about the Indian in the United States, I used to think, "Wow, where I'm stepping right now an Indian must have walked here. Oh, how interesting. This very land that I'm right now on, they must have been hunting. They must have been having maybe their community." So to me it was very vivid, very alive, and also, too, very

painful because I knew what they had suffered, the abuses they had had. It was not a novel; it was actual people, actual human beings. That, I think, is what was strong in our family, the history, injustice, and abuse and how you deal with it, and that you should do something about it no matter what way. That's why I really strongly believe that in whatever small way I can play a role in making our condition better than when I first started in through this world, that's what I want to do. Even if it's a small little thing, I want to make it a little bit better than when I first arrived. And that, I think, was the key motivating factor. Then, obviously, my years in the university, my love for study, even though we didn't have the resources, I was one of those students that you talk about, that I had heard that my cousin had gone to college in Texas, and I knew that I wanted□I've always, probably because of the probing of history also led me to be interested in studying and reading and finding. I was always very interested in finding out why this is this way or that way.

The only thing is that I didn't have the resources because my father, when I was a little girl, ended up having a disability, and therefore for a while my dad was disabled and my dad almost died. So we would have only had our mother to raise us, but, fortunately, he survived the surgery. We were very, very poor, as they say. I also learned a lot of thing about poverty, in terms that it takes away the dignity of the ser humano. The insults, the stereotyping about what it is to be poor, it was so opposite of what I experienced. Yes, physical financial resources were very, very limited, but there was a lot of richness in my family, a lot of richness, and partly because of my parents, because we always knew we were loved. We knew who we were because my father always taught us to be proud of who we were. We were Mexicans. We had a rich history. We should not feel□and this was very key for me. We were not arimados. This was our country. This was ours. We were not aliens. We were not□well, now we use the word "undocumented." The concept was not so much that we were born here, but it was not so much that we were born here but that this was our home and that we had every right, and we should walk everywhere with our heads held high. I remember he said, "(Spanish word), never walk with your hat in your hand." That's being humiliated or humbled. He says, "Don't be arrogant, but be proud." There's a difference between arrogance and pride. So I always felt that way. I may have walked into situations more reserved or more quiet, but I knew I had my place and I knew that I had every right as everybody else that sat on that table. So that, I think, also very important, and that's maybe some of the things that we need to work with our young people. We have still an inferiority complex, a feeling that we're not really belonging here, that we're newcomers. I know that we're not newcomers. Our history is there, hundreds of years in the Southwest.

Then if you want to really look into the reality, we're Mestizos. That means that we're partly Indian. My mother was so proud of our Indian heritage, and partly because of her own history in Mexico. Her grandmother was Indian, and her grandfather espanol, which is a very, very similar story. He was a military man and he was well off, but he fell in love and married an Indian. That was very disgraceful. So this is what my mother told me, that her grandfather had to make a choice. "You either keep on with this Indian, or we disinherited you." What I understand, he made the choice to leave his wife, who was Indian, because of, I guess, the stereotype of the Indian. So my grandfather, who was a product of that marriage, was really first-generation Mestizo and hated to be the Spaniard, because he never had his father, and his father had rejected his mother, and his mother sacrificed a lot for raising them in terms of it. That also colored how my mother then felt pride for her Indian background.

ESPINO:

This is your mother's mother we're talking about?

TOVAR:

This is my mother's□

ESPINO:

Grandmother?

00:35:47

TOVAR:

□grandmother. Yes. No, excuse me. It was, yes, my mother's grandmother. That's my mother's grandmother.

So that was another thing that interjects in many of our families, and my mother always tried to tell us not to say□you know, we often have a tendency to when we see a baby, "Oh, is that (Spanish phrase)," sort of giving more value to a child who's light-skinned versus someone who's dark-skinned or whatever attributes are more white. That was one thing that my mother always tried to make us believe,

that we're all important, no matter what color. I was the darkest one in my family, and I never felt any less. As a matter of fact, my dad would always go, "Mi negra." That was an endearing term, as you know. I never did feel□and I never even thought of when I was among us, it was not until I was in the Anglo world that I know I was stereotyped.

ESPINO:

So in your childhood, growing up in your family, you never felt different as far as□or you never felt like "Why me? Why did I have to be born with this?"

00:38:07

TOVAR:

No. No, not my color, not my physical features. The only thing I wanted to understand was the medical part, my being born with rickets. But my parents made me feel so loved, so cared for, that I could endure what a child usually has experiences that are so. Because I was in a hospital. I was kept there for a long time because at that time the doctors thought the way to deal with rickets was to put braces on you and keep you there and see if the bones would reshape themselves. Well, by then they already had set in. Then finally when they found out, and that's when I had my hospital experience, and that's when I first learned that there was another language. Because before that, remember, it was Pacoima where I was exposed to a more integrated community, but in Boyle Heights it was all Mexicans. We were all Mexicans. I use the word "Mexicans" because that's another thing, too, that hasn't been until maybe, what, the last forty years that we've seen other Latinos come into it. Because before that it was Mexican. That's what it was.

But that's when I interacted and I heard other words. I didn't understand what was happening when the doctors would come, because they had never had a child, at least at that ward or whatever, American-born, that had rickets. Rickets was something for underdeveloped countries, and they still are surprised when I see a doctor and they say, "You had rickets? You were born here?" (Laughs) So that in itself was an experience that I had. Now that I think about it as a mature woman, I think it was a blessing because it taught me, and I was learning all the way. For some reason, I was very observant, even as a child, of what was happening, my surroundings. It helped me understand now more the story of disabled children. It made me understand poverty. That's why I don't look back with regrets that we were poor. Actually, it was a great teaching lesson for me, because whenever we stereotype the poor, I know that there's just like any other class in our society, that there are differences. Sometimes the obnoxious poor, as sometime we're seen, there's a reason for why he may or she may be acting the way she is. Sometimes she doesn't understand her condition or why it is, and so she may give it a much more simplistic answer to why she is in the situation that she's in. Because I've lived through real poverty to the point that in my neighborhood among the poor, we were the poorest. But yet I remember my mother said things like, "Well, even if you have one dress, you wash it at night, you hang it up, and the next day you have a clean dress." In many situations during that time, that's exactly what would happen to us.

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ESPINO:

You'd wear the same dress each day?

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TOVAR:

Of course, yes, and the shoes. We did have two shoes, the one for school that we took off the minute we got home, and then the old one, the old battered one, that one we used at home. I remember when I was in college and girls were trying to be real cute and all these□and it was a different era where everything□they valued you on how you dressed and how you combed your hair. I had three dresses. Dresses, think about it, at college. One was pink, one was blue, and one was yellow. I had two pairs of shoes, and I had one sweater. I didn't have a coat. It was a blue sweater. That sweater I had to wash every day so it would be clean the next day. I did have a chance to rotate my dresses. But the girls were wearing skirts, were wearing pedal-pushers, were wearing saddle shoes. I don't know if you remember saddle shoes. So it was a different life. But because of my hunger, and I'll use the word "hunger," to go to college, I let that go. I knew that somewhere along the line I would be in a better position, because my father, who ended up being a construction worker, I remember he would come home in the summer,100-and-some degree, dehydrated, with literal□you could see his muscles spasms on his legs because he had been without water and because the employers also were less sensitive.

He would lie down on the floor of the living room and we would massage his legs so that he□and it was not till he stabilized that he would sit and have food, because even his stomach, you know. My dad used to say, "(Spanish phrase)." That was very, very poignant in us, and I think that motivated us, too, no matter what the obstacles were. One of the things that I think is important for us to realize is that

the only equalizer, the only equalizer for the poor is education. That's the most stable way of getting out of poverty. And there's sacrifices, and especially in my era, I'm talking about my era, nothing was given to you. There was no scholarship. There was no counselors who would encourage you to go on into college. I had good grades. I (unclear) the Iowa tests. I rated on the 10 top percent of the nation. Do you think I was given encouraged for a scholarship? No. I was active in the student body, which was another criteria for giving scholarships. No. I was very well received by my fellow students. There was not that recognition in my high school, San Fernando High School. There were clubs. The Latina girls who got good grades, belonged or were induced into Las Tapatias. The boys, the Chicanos who were able to get good grades and sports and all that, they went to the Caballeros. If you were white, the boys went to the Knights. If you were a young girl, white, then you ended up going to let's see. What was it? I even forget the name of the girls' white club. So we were segregated in your choices of study. They always automatically put the boys in workshop, and the girls were automatic in homemaking. My parents had to write a letter to the school telling them that they wanted Irene to go to what they call the academic, so that I wouldn't take homemaking. My sister, who was interested in business, also there was a letter that she had wrote that, "I would like my daughter to take business classes." We succeeded in both of those categories that we were put into, but it had to be with the request of our parents and the approval of the school.

ESPINO:

So can you tell me that story, how it played out? Did you get your class assignments, or did you know ahead of time what you needed to do?

TOVAR:

No. I knew. One thing I did know is that in order for you to be prepared for college, you had to take academic, be an academic major. So that was told, but it was not meant for us, for us as Mexicans. Okay? So in order for that when I found out that I wanted to, I vaguely remember being told that I would have to get a letter from my parents in order for me to think about it. I had the grades. I had As and Bs. So my parents did do that. And my sister was a straight-A student in business. So that was inequalities. When you talk about some of the things we as Mexican children have had to deal with in the educational system, I can give you another example which a lot people are shocked, but it was reality. At Pacoima Elementary School, if you spoke Spanish, they washed your mouth with soap. Now, think about it. You're a child, you're speaking Spanish, which is spoken in your home. You say, "Well, what did I do wrong?" And you start thinking, "Well, there must be something dirty about Spanish. There must be something bad about it." You start looking at yourself and you think, "But my family also speaks Spanish. There must be something wrong with my parents." You start getting feelings of somehow you're not acceptable or something's wrong with you, to the point that they wash your mouth with soap.

00:46:38

ESPINO:

That happened to you?

TOVAR:

No, thank god, it never happened to me, because I learned that I didn't speak Spanish in the (unclear).

ESPINO:

How terrible.

00:48:2600:50:20

TOVAR:

I learned real quickly, you don't have your teacher hear you speaking Spanish. Or not even in the playground. Then if you spoke Spanish in the classroom, this I witnessed. They would bring, let's say, Juanito in front of the students, all of us little kids, and they would say, "Extend your hand," and with a ruler she said, "Why am I going to punish you, Juanito?" "I spoke Spanish." Slam! This is true. This is true. Think about at a time when you want to be accepted, at a time that you want to be with your peers, peer pressure. So what's happening to all these children? You're intimidating them. You are making them not speak up. And then they wanted our respond. A, B, C, how do you say it? "Now, Juanito, how do you say it?" Well, Juanito, now is hesitant to even speak. So I don't think we really have dealt into the impact that that has happened to a generation of Latinos so that you hear mothers saying, "Well, I don't want my child to speak Spanish." You say, "What do you mean, you don't want him to speak?" "No, because I don't want him to go through what I went through." So we developed a class, a generation of Mexican Americans, who in part□and you see the results, too□don't want to identify so much as Mexicans. You sometimes hear them on TV saying, "Well, I don't know why we should have the Dream Act. I was raised here, and I learned how to do this and that."

And you say, "Oh, my goodness, that's a product of what that person was taught." So it's very dangerous what the schools can do, and that's why education is one of the most key factors in what we should really be looking at reform and how we should be looking at what systems we should have, what kind of teachers we should have, what kind of administrators we should have. Because we've got to face it. We've got to face the facts. Not my statement, but the facts of what a large percentage of the population we are. We are not going to go away. We're not. So it's to the benefit of our society that we trained as a population to be productive citizens, productive citizens, taxpayers, homeowners. God forbid right now, it's a tragedy what's going on. Well-employed, intelligent, productive, skilled workers, because not only do you then as a taxpayer not have to be putting more out to help this unskilled worker, but you're also helping for your Social Security because he's putting in the payroll. He pays part of it, and when John Doe White retires, he's going to benefit because there's some money in the Social Security system. So we've got to dramatize it that it is to the non-Latino community, in their interest, in their personal and professional national interest that you produce an educated Latino community. I mean, I'm getting data. Every time I ask for data on this institution or that institution, we're the majority or close to the majority. So what do you want from that group? You want an educated group.

ESPINO:

It's so interesting because you're talking about the fifties, the early fifties, when you were in (unclear).

TOVAR:

Yes.

ESPINO:

Not that it's the same, but the same effect is happening.

00:52:4300:55:2800:57:34

TOVAR:

It's more sophisticated. Let me just tell you. When we talk about discrimination□because I used to be□the governor now appointed me to various boards and commissions that dealt with□well, indirectly it came affirmative action, that no matter what the topic was, affirmative action was an element of consideration. Whenever you looked at that, you had to look at the figures. In every instance, you cannot ignore the presence and how that impacts the function of that agency and the policies. So my role was to make sure that the policies were more inclusive. Because some frightened non-Latino would say, "Oh, my god, it's going to become all Mexican." I said, "No. I'm interested in integrated policy that includes, that's inclusive. Yes, I am Latina, and I will never deny it. Yes, I am Mexican background." But I look at the data, and the data indicates to me where the need is the greatest, therefore that's our duty. That's what we've been assigned to. Where do we deal with the needs? It's not my preference that I exclude. That's not it. It has to be balanced and it has to include all of us. Some people don't understand when you develop more inclusive policies, you really benefit even that frightened non-Latino who's afraid of us. It makes it even better for him. That's what has to be understood, and sometimes it isn't. "Well, she's there. She's only interested in Latino issues." I think that's offensive. I'm there because, yes, I will not deny it, but that's because we're dealing with inequities. I'm there to ensure that those inequities are corrected, but I'm also interested in the welfare of all groups, because it also impacts us. It's a two-way street. We are not isolated. We impact each other.

When I look at discrimination, it's funny. The effects is what you have to look at. Because I now say that discrimination now comes with a suit and a tie. It means that it's more sophisticated. It's not "dirty Mexicans" or "no Mexicans allowed," which I did see. I actually saw that in our□every summer, almost every summer, when we were in our teens, we would go and visit our cousins in San Antonio, Texas, and we would drive through it. We did stop, I remember, in Arizona. Again, Arizona. We stopped at a gas station in which there was an Indian reservation in that town, and we were about to get some gas. It had a little café in the same place, and we were hungry, and we were going to eat. But then right there it said "No Mexicans or dogs allowed." I actually saw that. Then in San Antonio, well, actually on our route to San Antonio one time, we went on a bus, on the Greyhound bus, and I remember the bus stops and we transfer in El Paso, and then we take a bus from El Paso to San Antonio. I remember that we arrived and we got down in El Paso, and there was a round wooden table, and it was even rough. There were about four African Americans, and that was the only places they could sit and we could sit. It was very shocking for me, because I was a teenager then, because by then my parents, again, definitely did not believe in that. I was sort of shocked, and I wondered, "Here I am in Texas. Are we going to be more careful here?" But it was right in your face. In a way that's more honest, because you can actually deal with that. It's in your face. You're not misunderstanding. You don't misunderstand it. But now it's more sophisticated. It's very polite in the way that they do it, for those that are that way. But yet, at the same, while I'm talking about that, I'm very optimistic that there are□I see sometimes people in three ways in terms of the issue of discrimination. There are those that will never, never accept you, and there are those that will, those that do want justice, and there's a middle group that doesn't yet know what to do.

I feel our role is to educate and work with those that could become sympathetic and understanding. The ones that will never change, don't even use your energy for. Work with those that can be sympathetic to you and believe in justice. Because I don't believe every white is a racist. I don't. I've had the opportunity during the Civil Rights Movement to have met wonderful human beings of all races and religions. But we've got to work with people that believe in the same things we do who are not Latino. This is where I really feel that the Ethnic Studies have to prepare our young people not only to know who they are, but also intellectually know that the Chicano history is part of American history. It's too bad that that's a result of discrimination, you see. It's historical distortion of what really happened and the role we've played in this country, so that we've had to create ethic studies. If the history had really been taught as it really happened, you would not have to develop Ethnic Studies. So Ethnic Studies has a number of roles. One is to really correct and describe what our real role has been. The other one is to provide us with confidence in our role in this country and role models. The third thing that I really think we have to work on is how do we prepare these young people to integrate into a non-Latino community, because most of them are first-generation students and have often lived in isolated barrios. We need to learn how to work in the non-Latino world because it is ours also, and we need to be integrated there so we can sit in the table and be part of the decisionmaking and the policymaking.

When we're not there, we may be missed, either intentionally or just by pure ignorance or whatever. So we have to prepare our young people to be able to sit in that table of policymaking and decisionmaking. That's why I participate in many activities that do that, to encourage that, and I try to encourage our young people to do that. We have to, in the Ethnic Studies classes, help our young people feel comfortable, like what my parents did a long time ago. "(Spanish name), this is your country. You can go anywhere. This is yours, and you can participate in anything." I didn't really realize the real big implication of that statement, but it means that we will be change agents wherever we go that is not so monolithic. Do you know what I mean?

ESPINO:

I also think that what your parents are teaching you is a sense of entitlement, and I'm wondering how that idea interacted with the ideas of your teachers in, say, elementary school. Did they try to squash your spirit or did they encourage you?

00:59:18

TOVAR:

Let me just say if I think about elementary, now bear in mind that I was absent many times in elementary because I was hospitalized in and out. I went to a hospital. I haven't yet dealt with that. But I don't think there was either encouragement or discouragement, just sort of let go. It was, "Okay, here's your class, do this," and okay.

But I wanted to learn. I only remember one teacher in elementary. She was Mrs. Eddington (phonetic), and she was just a very nice lady, as a child, that I encountered. Other than that, I didn't feel any□it was like I was there, but that's okay. I was part of the furniture. That was it. There was no neither discouragement or encouragement. But I think neglect in itself is discrimination. Neglect is discrimination or differential treatment. By the time I went to junior high, I really, according to the teachers, I was a very good student, I was getting As and that. So I was the one that sort of was doing my thing, and so they would acknowledge that. There was patting me on the back, "Good thing, Irene. Good thing, Irene." That was about it in junior high school. The only thing that I remember is that one year my father, we moved and we lived six months in Buena Park and six months in Norwalk, and that's when I met that teacher that I tell you was so tough, and I thought she was so mean. But now I understand she was the best teacher I ever had because she made sure that I□and she was like that with all of us. That's the other good thing. She didn't differentiate. She treated us the same. She was tough with all of us, you know.

ESPINO:

Had high expectations.

01:02:0101:03:50

TOVAR:

Yes. She didn't say it, but by the mere fact that she treated us all the same, was tough on all of us, expected good things of all of us, that in itself was positive. Now I know. In high school perhaps was my greatest disappointment because again it was an issue of neglect. If I rated 10 percent of the nation's students who took this test, it was a nationwide test, that should have been a signal to the teachers, the counselors, that, hey, this is a student that maybe we could□she's low income, but my god, she's getting As and Bs. She took the national test, and she was in the 10 percent of the nation. And that was one that tested you in history, literature, mathematics, science. It was a whole□and I didn't get a scholarship, and I wanted so badly to go to UCLA. That's where I wanted. That's where I had heard UCLA. But obviously I didn't have the money. Obviously I didn't have transportation. Obviously all those obviously that you need to have gone to UCLA.

So that's why I'm so supportive to the public higher education system, because without it I would have not made it. I would have not made it. My father wanted to take a second job so that he could pay for my expenses. I refused it because I said, "Dad, if you're going to work for another job to get more money, you spend it on the family. If you go□." Because he was very persistent, and I said, "If you do that, Father, I will not take the money. Just give me the permission," because my dad was careful with his daughters. He was very protective of his daughters. I said, "Dad, if you give me permission to work, I can babysit." After talking to him, he finally agreed that he would let me work, but I always laugh at this, because my dad, instead of the parents interviewing me, my dad would interview the parents. (Laughs) Or whenever I would babysit, and I did babysit and I ironed and I washed dishes. Bless the junior college system, because with $30 I was able to have sixteen units and all my books. Think about it at that time. It's sad what's now happening to higher education, because, in effect, we are again excluding the poor. We're excluding the poor. Right now, $30 might not even get you a book. So we're in an emergency situation, and we're now going to exclude many, many young people who are poor.

Hopefully, because we are in a different era, too, that there's more encouragement, more knowledge within our own community about fighting for our rights. Our students have stood up and demanded better things. That's the salvation. That may be our salvation, that it won't get as bad as it already is. But I went to a community college, Valley College, where I got my AA degree, with a lot sacrifice. But I don't care. I don't mind it, because it was worth it.

ESPINO:

What was the sacrifice?

01:05:31

TOVAR:

Things like resources, the money just to pay the tuition, because I had to leave. That's why I didn't graduate exactly. I didn't go through the four years, because I didn't have scholarships. So one year I worked at a toy factory, and that was also□I also look at that as a wonderful lesson in life. It was a toy factory, Knickerbocker. I'll never forget. It was mostly women and mostly Latinas or poor white women who were usually either very poor, were single mothers. We worked from seven o'clock in the morning until, I believe, three. We had a ten-minute break in the morning, a ten-minute break in the afternoon, thirty minutes for lunch. We must have been about three hundred of us in one food truck, so you can imagine how we would run through and the bathroom within ten, because sometimes we didn't even get□because there was such a long line to the bathroom, there was some of us in those ten minutes didn't end up going, and then we wouldn't have a break until lunchtime. So you learned that.

I also learned to appreciate and respect women who work in unskilled positions, because at that time, and I don't know now, it probably still exists, the supervisors were male, they were all male, and some of the womens had to give in order to keep their job. That I did witness one time. I forget what the belt is called, some kind of a□

ESPINO:

Conveyor?

TOVAR:

Conveyor belt. There you go. The conveyor belt. First of all, I was so ignorant about union, too, that's the other thing. Let me first go to the story where the abuse took place. I had gone real quickly to the bathroom, and they had allowed me during my work time to go because I didn't get to because the line was so long. I was trying to take a shortcut to get back to the□what is it?

ESPINO:

The conveyor belt.

TOVAR:

The conveyor belt. So I went through where there was the boxes. There was this supervisor taking advantage, sexually advantage, of this woman, and the woman I knew was a very dignified mother. But she was a single mother. I was shocked. I was shocked that I saw it. So that was one lesson I learned.

ESPINO:

Did you ever talk to her afterwards about that?

01:07:4001:09:20

TOVAR:

Oh, no. I didn't want to embarrass her. I mean, I even tried to see if I could pretend like it never happened, but I was a young girl. I was a young girl. I must have been around, what, maybe my twentieth year or so. You don't understand many□well, I was too embarrassed to approach her, and then how would I approach her? If I was now a woman of my age, I would probably have done that. But I know from then on she was always very embarrassed. She was a nice lady, and I didn't want to□and I was a young girl.

The other thing is that I learned about management and the role of the unions. I remember they put me at the beginning at the front of the belt. Oh, I was very good, I was real fast, very fast (demonstrates), and then I had at the end they were the packers. You each had a role. You put something together and then at the end there was a packer. They were called packers, and they were the ones that put them in the box that was ready to be shipped, shipped off. Then I got the union person come and talk to me during the break, says, "Irene, you're working too fast. If you do, we'll lose our bonus," because apparently if you did a certain number which was considered very good, you would get a bonus for all the people that were in the line, and I was depriving them of it. So guess what they did? They put me almost to the end, and I can understand that, because I was being paid when I first got in that job. As a matter of fact, I had to beg them to give me the job because, "You're overqualified," because I was a college student. I said, "But I need it. I need it to go on with my college education." So I guess they felt sorry for me, and they gave me the job. It was really something that I learned, too, in terms of reality. I had been very, very poor, but my parents had done their very best to, in a way good or bad, isolate me to some of those painful realities, because it was already painful to be poor, to be deprived.

You know, it's interesting to study. One day some sociologists study the child of the poor. All of a sudden you know English so you interpret for your parents at a hospital, at a clinic, sometimes very adult subjects that a child doesn't yet understand or may be able to□you know. It's really a burden on that child to do that, and how do you deal with that? What impact does it have for the child? There's so many elements of being poor that are not really understood or studied yet. I feel privileged that I've had the opportunities through my job to serve the poor. That's been my main job description, if you want to say that. Then I wanted to make sure that whatever I learned I could translate it to those that didn't understand it. I did it through trainings, I did it through speeches, I did it through□I remember with a school when they were trying to understand the bilingual child. I spoke in many workshops, hopefully with the thought that I would be

able to translate, to let them see the picture I saw, that they would also see it and be more understanding and more willing to change their policies or instruction material, how they talked to a child that was poor and didn't have the same thing that other children had, and encourage them as teachers and administrators to see the dignity of that child and to be willing to provide the resources that were needed for that child to succeed. As you know, that's still an issue. That's still an issue.

01:11:25

ESPINO:

It's just such an important issue, and I wonder, because you had an experience in U.S. public education as a child of the working class, I guess in your house you spoke only Spanish.

01:13:0601:15:2901:17:14

TOVAR:

Well, to my parents we did. To my parents we did. You know how it is. To our parents we did. Among us, we both used both languages, because my parents had a very strict rule. They wanted us to learn good Spanish and good English. So my mother, she didn't like that we (Spanish word). (Spanish phrase). You either speak correctly in Spanish or correctly in English. Now, my parents both knew how to read and write, and I'm talking read and write in English. They were not illiterate. They knew both in Spanish and in English, but they were not proficient in it, in other words, in English. I remember one time I was sick. We only spoke Spanish to my parents, I remember. One day I was real sick and I stayed home, and there was a knock at the door. It was when the insurance man would come to your house, and I don't know if you know this, and pick up the premiums. In the olden days the insurance man would come to your house, and you would pay them the premium instead of mailing it out like we do now or whatever we do now with the computer. All of a sudden, I could hear my mother speaking in English. I said, "No wonder my mom always figures out what we're going to do," because among us, my sister and I would sometimes start speaking English, thinking our mother didn't know. We could always wonder how did she know all these things, and she would always say, "Oh, a little bird told me." (Laughs) Well, my mother knew English. She just didn't speak it. All of a sudden I'm hearing her speak to the insurance man in English, not perfect English but she was able to communicate and get the issue across.

Then obviously she would always on Thursday, I believe Thursdays, she would always read the newspaper on the sales, and that was in English. It's not like today that they put it in English and Spanish, I don't know if you've noticed, on the newspapers when they have ads. But it was funny, because that's how I knew no wonder she knows when we're going to do something. I thought my mother was the smartest woman in the world. She even anticipated what we were doing. Well, all the time she was hearing what we were saying in English. So there's some things that are really endearing to me in terms of our experience and in terms of when you don't have not. But what I was going to say about the children, even among us we would say, "Oh, don't tell my mom that we want this, because that will make her feel bad." So we developed a sensitivity to our parents' inability to give us what we know they would want to give us. Also, too, my mother□both of them believed strongly in equalization, and I mean it in this way. I remember one time□because to have a can of peach was a treat. One day we had a can of peaches, so my mother sat us on the table, and there was a little dish in front of us. So to make sure that she knew that she was giving us all an equal part, she gave me one, then she would go to my other, give the other one, until we exhausted the can. But we knew that we were equally loved and that we were equally being given what we want. So that added to our feeling of security, of being loved, and that, I think, is very strong. Sometimes among the poor, parents love their children, but they don't know how to do that or how to teach their children, and sometimes unwisely they may make□it's not only among the poor, but because the poor already have so many things working against them, it would be better we could do parenting classes for them so that they know how to work for their kids. They'll fight for their kids tooth and nail, but at the same time you'll hear that parents say (Spanish phrase). You know how we talk to the children, and the children then feel, "Well, maybe I am." Yet that mother will fight tooth and nail for that child if someone tries to abuse that child.

I make it a point to shop when as much as possible to stores where Mexicans go or Latino parents go because I also observe how they deal with their children. Or sometimes it's so sad, "No, (Spanish phrase)." You're telling a child no, that they can't. And it's interesting. Everywhere I see lessons, lessons about life and lessons about how the poor live and how those that have better. I strongly believe in seeing the other world, and then I see the other world and I can always make comparison. When you do that, you start thinking, "Hmm. They have it. Why can't we have it?" But when you live in an isolated community, you never know that there's a difference. You accept that as part of life. Then also (Spanish phrase). Well, no, because you want to raise parents in a community that stands up for their rights, but if you think that's a given, you accept it. We want our community to know that there is differences. We want them to know that they deserve the same services that anybody have. I even take it so much as on the freeways. If you go to the high-income areas, oh, the freeways are so well landscaped. If you come to low-income areas, what happened? What's this big blotch and what's this big tree that has been dead for years? It's sort of sad. So I observed all those things, and we should all do that.

I'm always learning from everybody, and I learned a lot of lessons from the poor, a lot of human lessons that I've not ever had the opportunity to learn with a non-white world because I didn't have to experience that. At the same time, in the non-Latino world, I've learned ways of how to hopefully change what is deprived in the poor community.

ESPINO:

This will be the last question then we can stop. Or are you ready to stop now?

TOVAR:

No, you. I was thinking about you.

ESPINO:

Because you're such an intuitive person and you observe, is there something that you can look at your elementary education, you can look at it and you can say this worked, we should implement it today? "This worked for me. This teacher, what she did or how she handled." What was it about your experience that made it so successful?

01:19:2201:21:4701:23:17

TOVAR:

I'm not negative, and I'm not saying, "Oh, woe be me, I was deprived," da, da, da. Honestly, as honest as I can to that question, at least right now thinking about it, I think it was a motivation that existed in my family. It was so strong, now that I can look at it in retrospect, because, remember, my parents let me know that I was someone, that I brought with me culture, language, that I was capable, that I was smart, that I could do it. Also my parents taught me to understand discrimination. I knew about it, so even though I would come home and I had good communication with my parents, when I came I could talk about, "Well, Dad," or, "Mom, this happened," or that happened. They'd say, "(Spanish phrase), don't let that get you. You go right ahead." I can't help but say that was it.

Unfortunately, I cannot say one teacher was a turning point, not because some of them were mean, it's just that they just went along with it. It was not an era of making you feel like I've met wonderful non-Latino teachers that are so committed to that minority child, they will give their all and they'll encourage that. That didn't exist in my era, remember. That was before the Civil Rights Movement. That was before the discussion of bilingual education. I was involved in the battle to bring in bilingual teachers and all that. That was a different era, different like day and night. A lot of things have happened. A lot of things have changed, but I'm describing to you my era, at least my experience during that era. In it, I saw many bright young Chicanos and Chicanas that didn't make it, not because they were not smart, not because they didn't have the but there was nobody there to held them up. Because my parents were older parents and they had gone through that experience, I was dealing with students whose parents had been born here and who had been subject to that discrimination and thought that there was something wrong with them, that it was better to be all Anglo, that they didn't want their children to learn Spanish, that type because of what they had gone through. It was not the civil rights. Because, remember, I was a student during the fifties, just before the coming of the Civil Rights Movement, and I was a college student during the Civil Rights Movement, so that there were changes that were occurring. So that's why I tell you that. Not that I did not have nice teachers, not that I had teachers who would tell, "Oh, very good, Irene. You're doing very well," but there wasn't, unfortunately in my experience there might be in other people, but in my experience I didn't have someone who mentored me. There was no one. Because if not, when I got that test, the Iowa test, that would have been enough in this time to have, "Oh, we've got to get Juanita to make sure what scholarships are there available. Let's meet with her parents and let them know that this child is a gifted child," whatever. That didn't exist.

So other eras after me might encounter that, but at least well, the best thing I can say is that I had never had my mouth washed with soap. (Laughs) I never was humiliated by being in front of the school. But what did I have to do in order that not to happen to me? I had to be quiet. I had not to speak Spanish. I had to make sure that if I had a burrito, I hid it when I ate it. The kids who were more Mexican were made fun of, and this is true. This is true in Pacoima, and I will even give you the scoop on Pacoima Elementary. If your parents, and there were a lot of parents who were Mexicanos like my parents were, and if you brought to lunch burritos, you were made fun of. The ones that ate burritos usually ate together, because then the Mexicanos, the Chicanos born here of the generation that were born here, would make fun of them because they had been taught that that was negative, you see. They had been taught in school to see that as something negative or something to make fun of. So there has been a revolution. It's not there yet, that has finished its goal. It's a continuing one. There have been changes, I will note, because I, along with other people I don't want to tell you that I was a M____, that together we made

ESPINO:

Excellent. That's a great place to stop. (End of October 12, 2011 interview)

SESSION TWO (October 21, 2011)

00:00:36

ESPINO:

This is Virginia Espino, and today is October 21st. I'm interviewing Irene Tovar at her home in Mission Hills. I'm a little still thinking about your nephew, and I hope everything turns out, the story you told me before we started talking. You were going to mention how high school was different back then, because your nephew is growing up here in the Valley, too, like you did. You were going to talk a little bit about what high school was like for you when you were growing up in the fifties here in the Valley.

00:02:3000:05:2400:07:0800:09:3800:11:28

TOVAR:

In my era, which was the mid fifties and the late fifties, it was very different. It didn't matter if you were a good student, Mexican American student, there were different standards for you. You were either ignored completely or neglected, if you want to put that word. Because basically I was a very good student, I used to get As and I used to get Bs, and I was pretty well accepted by my fellow student. I was even in student body. I represented my class, class representative. In the Iowa tests, there used to be an Iowa test which was a nationwide test, and I took that one in high school, and I was told I rated at the top 10 percent of nation. Yet I never got a scholarship, and that really hurt me, because my family was very low income, and it would have been a hardship for them if they were to carry the load of my education. I was disappointed with my□we had home classes that we had. That was your basic class that we all belonged to, and we were put into those classes alphabetically. I really liked my senior class teacher. When it came time to make recommendation for scholarship, I had a higher score than another non-Chicano, and I never got a scholarship. It really hurt me because I really liked that teacher, and I had faith in the teacher that she also liked me and she respected that I was doing so good in my classes. So that was a difference. None of us got scholarships.

The other thing is that students like me and students that were Latinos and were in so-called good attendance, good grades, active in the student body, they were selected to be members of these prestigious clubs. However, they had two standards. If you were Latino, you were nominated to Las Tapatias, and if you were a Chicano and had good grades, were in athletics, etc., you belong to Los Caballeros. However, if you were white, the girls were nominated to the Ladies and the boys belonged to the Knights. We were kept separate. We were good kids, but we were separated and our activities were separate. That also left a mark in me in terms of as a child, as a young woman, and it reinforced the things that my father had told us about differential treatment and that the word was discrimination. So I was very aware and sensitive to that, and I guess I felt very indignant as a young girl. But I was not going to let that kill my passion. I felt very strongly about going to college, and I knew I had a lot of things working against me, economics, transportation, because we only had one car, and that car belonged to my dad so he could go to work. It was a little old jalopy, but it was a car that took my car to and from. So that going to college was a hardship, a true hardship. As I mentioned, economics, transportation, even things at that time when clothing was so important. Remember, that was the time of the pedal-pushers, saddle shoes, and all those kind of things that were so important. I remember that I had three dresses. Dresses, keep in mind, not skirts like they were popular, and the cute little blouses with the little flower that you wore right by your throat. But my mother believed as long as you're clean, it doesn't matter. So you wear one dress today, you wash it, and the next day, if necessary, you put the same one, but it's clean. I had one sweater. I'll never forget the color of the sweater. It was a blue, a beautiful blue, and that one I had to wash every day because that was the only sweater I had. And shoes, I only had two pairs of shoes, the shoes for school and the shoes for home. That had been the standard, so I accepted that even when I was in high school.

But I think the other thing that was so key, just looking at transportation in itself as a reflection, too, of the times. I lived in Pacoima when I went to college, and I remember the first day I went to register. I didn't know anything other than I had to register. So I took the bus to Los Angeles Valley College, which was in Van Nuys, and I didn't know a thing other than where do I go to register? That was the words I didn't know. I didn't know about matriculation. I didn't know about credits. I didn't know units. I didn't know about the word "semester." To me those were all new words that I was learning, because even though I had been on a college track at high school, and they did prepare you, so called, what they prepared me for was writing reports and not in terms of what it meant to be actually in a college. So I went and they told me you have to run for your classes. I literally thought you had to run to your classes. That's how little I knew about what college life was. That's what nowadays first-generation students, it's so important that orientation take place and you really help transition that student to what college life is going to be. That didn't exist in my times. So I registered and I paid a total of $30 and that included sixteen units, included all my books. Can you just imagine all my books? And that started me off.

Then I had to deal with the issue of transportation, because the buses would pass through Laurel Canyon every hour. I lived opposite. I lived on San Fernando Road, which is more than a mile, and I had to walk a mile every day to get the eight o'clock. Well, actually earlier, because I had to be in class at eight o'clock, and so I had to make sure. If I missed that bus, I had to wait another hour before I could get another bus. The other thing is that I was very sensitive to the fumes of the buses. It was also another era of when that didn't exist, the thing. So I used to arrive with headaches, because I really reacted to the fumes and exhaust. I had to take a transfer. So, first of

all, I had to get up real early, walk a mile, which was healthy, but nowadays healthy. At that time I didn't feel it was a good thing in rain or cold or whatever, or hot weather. Then I took the bus up to Chandler, and then from Chandler I took a transfer that took me down to□I can't at that time even remember the street, and then walk down to get to the school. That in itself was you arrive exhausted, having fought the fumes, and it was very difficult. But I was determined that I was going to get my education. I had a lot of things that really were difficult in terms of getting orientated to college life. Because I knew of discrimination, you see, I was very well discrimination, I wanted to be a history teacher. But I told myself just in case they don't hire me, I'm going to take some typing classes so maybe I can be hired as a secretary or as a clerk-typist, because I knew my sister who had been a business major had gotten a job as a secretary. So I said that's seemed easy. So I kept in mind that discrimination was a factor in my career, in my life, whatever my life was going to be like. But I was determined that I was going to fight, even against those odds, in terms of, because, remember, it was the late fifties. The Civil Rights Movement was just starting.

So that was my life at Valley College. Because of my finances, I actually, after I graduated after two years at Valley College, I stayed one semester longer because I didn't have the money to transfer to CSUN. At that time, it was just about to change from San Fernando Valley College to California State University at Northridge. So I stayed a semester longer to do that. Since I didn't have any scholarships, I didn't even know there was such thing as loans, and maybe even if I had known about it, I might have felt that I was not going to get it, because it was very obvious that it was a differential treatment, even though Valley College was one of the most progressive schools that I now see in retrospect, because I did have excellent professors in their subject matter, and some of them were really sympathetic and understanding to the needs of minorities, but it was in how they dealt in the classroom, not that other resources would be available to you or anything. But that's when I started feeling that I was choosing the right thing to do, that even though I was sacrificing a lot, because that meant also, too, my family was sacrificing a lot because that was one less earner at home. My sister did end up working right away after high school. My brother was about to graduate, and he wanted to be a police officer or a forest ranger, but he still worked, and he eventually did finish his career goals.

But I was the one that was going to take the longest, and I felt guilty at the same time, but I wanted so badly to get a college education, because I knew that was one less bread earner in the family since my mother was a stay-at-home mother. But when I did transfer to CSUN, which is now CSUN that added another dimension to the struggle, because around that time my mother had cancer. (Cries)

ESPINO:

Oh, are you okay?

TOVAR:

That was hard.

ESPINO:

I bet.

TOVAR:

That was very hard.

ESPINO:

Did you know it was cancer at the time?

TOVAR:

Well, yes. My mother was feeling very bad, and since I was the only one that didn't work, as Mexican traditions, you have a responsibility to your family. So that impacted my college years. At the beginning she had to go every single day to get what they call□what is it, the very sensitive□that you had and they had to protect you?

ESPINO:

Chemo? Chemotherapy?

TOVAR:

No, it wasn't even chemotherapy. She had radar. She had uterine cancer is what she had, and every day she had to go, and I went with her. So that meant I didn't go to school. I look at now and I said thank god things are changing. I went to my counselor at CSUN, and I told him why I wasn't coming to school. He didn't believe me. I thought I would have a very sympathetic counselor. He said, "You're a habitual liar." I felt so bad.

00:13:39

ESPINO:

Why would he say something like that to you?

00:16:01

TOVAR:

I don't know. You see, it was a different times. It was a different times. It was a time that I guess□I don't know. It was just different. There was no understanding, no effort to understand the first-generation student. I think those are the things that really make me feel so strongly that no child, no child should have to go through that in order to get a college education. Think about it. Why should you? The most basic and the greatest investment that this country can make for its own welfare is to educate every single one of its citizens. It's not a one-way street, it's a two-way street. You educate that student, you produce a self-sufficient individual. You then get income. We're talking about Social Security, and we're concerned about that they're going to take it because so-called there isn't any money. Well, I have a different opinion. There is money. But the point is that when you have a person who is employed, he pays taxes. He pays payroll taxes that goes to Social Security, which means that we have it for future generation, you know. So it's very funny what discrimination can do. The discriminator doesn't realize that it's also hurting him or her. The institutions don't understand that it also hurts them when they discriminate. Their own self-interest is impacted by that. So it was very difficult, because I wanted to come. That meant that I missed classes, that I wasn't there when the lectures took place. So when I did go, I was already behind. Then, luckily, fortunately, my mother recovered from the cancer, but it took a long while, and I have no regrets that I did go with my mother every day to have her radar treatment. It was radar, as they call it.

I remember when I went to□it took about, what is it, about an hour and a half, I'm thinking right off, and out of that hour and a half then they wouldn't let me see her. Then when I did go see her, I had to wear an apron that was very thick, so that I would not get the effects of her. So we had to wait then a longer after that a while, and then we would come home. That was every day, and I right now can't even remember how long it was, but I think it was a long, long time for her, and then, thank god, she recovered from the cancer that she had.

ESPINO:

What did that treatment do to her, do you remember? What side effects did it have?

TOVAR:

You know, we knew so little. My mother eventually had cancer again, but that was much, much years later. I don't know. That might have been the effects of that first cancer that she had. But it must have. It must have, because she had cancer again. So it was not the same one, but it still was in the general area that she had it. So it must have.

ESPINO:

How about anything like what happens with chemotherapy, where the hair falls out, nausea, things like that?

TOVAR:

I don't remember that happening to my mother.

ESPINO:

Really?

00:18:2000:20:04

TOVAR:

No, I don't remember. But it was not chemotherapy because I think chemotherapy was not in existence there, or it wasn't the kind that you gave to someone who had uterus cancer. My mother had always had a hardship with her birth of her children, so that might have been the reason that she had that. But at that time, they didn't tell you too much, and you didn't know what to ask. I was a young woman, so I didn't understand many of those things that were medical of that type. I guess, too, that's the other thing, where she went, they just did whatever they had to do. They didn't explain to you, just do this, do that, and we did it. We were so scared about what that meant.

But, thank god, my mother did recover from that, but it impacted my college years. As I said, I have no regrets that I did that, I would do it again if it had to happen, but it definitely impacted my studies. But what I would do is that when I would go, I would just listen very carefully to everything that was being said, because there's also the issue of resources. I think of our young people nowadays who don't have those resources. I couldn't afford tutoring, if there was such a thing as tutoring. I didn't even know that there was such a thing. I didn't know if I could go to my professors and ask him, because at that time the professors were king. Nowadays you evaluate your professor. That was unknown in my generation. The professor was it. He could make or break you. If he liked you and if he was a fair professor, you were lucky. If for whatever reason he didn't like you or you questioned anything he said or she said□it was mostly men at that time□you didn't question too much or you didn't debate with your professor. The idea of evaluation was a strange unknown thing. So you could go, in all honesty, to a professor and talk to him about your grade, but sometimes that was very difficult. It was like questioning him, and indirectly he might impact that, so you had to make a judgment call whether you did do that or not.

When I went to CSUN, we only had identified themselves as Mexican Americans were five students, and there rest of them were white, almost all of them, except a few, few blacks. It was strange if you saw any minorities in the campus. Asians also were very spare, sparingly part of the student body. So that I'll never forget the five of us, one of them was a history teacher or became a history teacher, but then he became a history professor at Pasadena College. The other male became a bilingual teacher and afterwards taught abroad and came back in the Middle East when the wars came. Then the two other students, fellow students, became teachers. One became a special-needs teacher, and then the other one became an elementary teacher, and she happened to have passed away from breast cancer. I'll always remember her. There was me, and I don't know what I became. (Laughs) But there was the five of us, and we were there full-time, and we tried to□

ESPINO:

You stuck together?

00:22:2600:24:3900:27:52

TOVAR:

We all went so far away. The one that passed away, well, obviously, I don't see her. As a matter of fact, she became a teacher at one of the local elementaries here. The one that became a special-needs, she went up north, and I lost track of her. We were connected for about a good fifteen years after we graduated. I kept in touch with the bilingual teacher until he went to Saudi Arabia to teach English to the Saudis. Then Henry, who became a professor, off and on I have seen him. But we were the five. We even tried to form a club to have some kind of a support system. At that time we went to one professor that was Latino, and he didn't want to have a club. He says, "You shouldn't separate yourself. You should integrate into the society."

We didn't want to integrate, but we needed that support system and we looked to him as a role model. But I guess he had the problem also, too, of trying to be accepted because why other would you say that? That's the tragedy of discrimination, what it does to persons. Some of them are in denial. They don't want to be who they are, because they think that will be a failure, that they're failures if they have their (unclear), or they won't be accepted. This is where I'm so grateful to my parents, who taught me who I was and who told me never to deny who I was. That was me and if I denied who I was, I was denying them. I said, "Oh, I love my parents. I would never deny my parents no matter what." But in some cases, some kids do deny their parents, who they are, their ways, their customs, because somehow they've been made to believe that that is negative or that is not worthy or that's something wrong with their parents. That's a tragedy. The other element of discrimination and self-worth, your value, yourself, you're denying who you are. I mean, that's a very major thing. That's psychologically mental health and all those things that now we strive to ensure that a child has a healthy concept of themselves. But it was a challenge. During that time, because I was limited in funds, that's where when I told my dad and mom that I wanted to go to college, I know my dad wanted to help me and take a second job, and I refused the money. I said, "If you take a second job, I will not take the money. But, Dad, give me permission to work." Because Dad protected his three daughters, perhaps very, very more than he should.

But he did give me permission, so I ended up babysitting. I washed dishes. I ironed. I always tell this story that my dad was so funny. Now I laugh. At that time I was a young girl, so I would be embarrassed. He would interview those that I was going to babysit, instead of them interviewing me about my capacity to babysit. But that helped me to pay my college way. I paid all my way through. One year I used all my money, because the books got more expensive and tuition, etc., and I left school for one whole year. I was so sad that I had to leave. I worked at a toy factory. It was called Knickerbocker, and I remember in North Hollywood. The greatest thing that could have happened to me was to have that experience, because even though we were very poor, in a way my parents protected us from that hurt of being poor. That's when I worked in a factory that was all women, mostly all women. It was mostly all women. Of course, the supervisors were male. Again, women could not be in those positions in terms of talking about women issues. I started off earning $1.05, and when I left one year later, I was earning $1.25. You started working at seven o'clock in the morning. You had a ten-minute break. You had a thirty-minute lunch, an afternoon ten-minute break, and you were out at three. You stood all those eight hours. There was no chairs, there was nothing. You were standing. This belt that passed with all the toys that you assembled, it was an assembly line, I remember. I remember that I put together, with the help of the other ladies, a BB gun, and I put together a ball, and, boy, the BB gun was I said, "Boy, that kid better treat this gun right," because what you had to do, you dealt with glue that smelled terrible, and there was no masks that they would put. The issue of safety issues in that factory were incredible now that I know what I know. So you had the glue that smelled terrible, and then you had a little coil that was made out of wire. So you had to real quickly put this little coil, whatever it was, and then you had to paste it. Sometimes you cut yourself with that little wire that we had to put, which is the one that would throw away the whatever it was, the BB, and then you would get the glue. So sometimes you had blood and you had glue on top of it and nobody took care of what effect that glue had on your finger.

You got home all bloody and tired, and your feet hurt, and I said, "If anything makes me want to go back to college, it's the experience I'm having now." Now, I learned so much from those women. They were mostly single mothers. There was widows. Their stories really could make a novel in terms of what they went through in the factory life. So I learned to respect women who work in factories, what they had to go through, the importance of a union in terms of protecting them, and also, too, what happened, the relationship between male supervisors and women who were helpless. Also, too, the management. Here we were, we must have been, what, about three hundred women, a bathroom that had maybe about, what is it, ten stalls, ten minutes to go to the bathroom. If you wanted to have a juice or something, the food truck was there. You either got one or the other, or sometimes you didn't get any. Then you had to go back until noon and then thirty minutes you gobbled your food, and then you went back to work. If anything, working conditions became something that I had visualized. I knew my dad worked hard. I knew he came home with spasms on his legs because dehydrated being working out in the sun, 100-and-some degree working with the cement and all that kind of stuff. But now I had actually lived it. I had seen my dad, but now I had actually lived it myself in a different venue but basically the same thing.

00:29:50

ESPINO:

Did you realize it at the time?

00:31:35

TOVAR:

I just knew. When I left that place, I knew that I didn't want to I knew one thing for sure. I wanted to finish my education. Second, I learned to really respect those women. My parents had always taught me that all jobs were dignified as long as they were honest, that any job should be respected. But now I have actually seen it. I have actually seen the women that had a choice in their life. I didn't know, like I know now, the categories like management and labor. I knew that there was a union. They were unionized, but it was a weak union. But I knew that there was a union. I understood the importance of the union. My dad had been a union member. But it had been a very sad situation with my dad's union, because of their depending on who was a favorite of the one who doled out the jobs, because he was a construction worker. Every morning, if you didn't have a job, you went and you reported to the union. You got on the list, and that list was supposed to be for who signed up first, who signed second. Well, they didn't follow it. Whoever was in favor of the one that assigned the jobs was the one that got the jobs, and sometimes they paid to get the job on it. So I learned a lot about the value of unions. Now I understand. I would only say, "Gee, the bosses are not fair," or something like that, but it was not in the clearest terms that now I understand.

Working conditions, obviously, were something. Why don't they give us a little bit more time? Why don't they have more bathrooms? Why don't they have chairs for us to sit, since we were standing all day? And our backs, I know a lot of the women who had been there had problems with their backs. Also there were the painters who were the ones that got the most who painted with the spray the toys, and they didn't have masks. Obviously it would affect their future health. I never was long enough there to know that, but I know that they would say, "Oh, you know Maria," who had been a painter for, let's say, five years, "she's having problems. She can't breathe," or whatever. So now I can understand that there should have been something to protect that painter in terms of a mask or whatever's required. I did question those things, but I didn't put them in categories like I would now know, that you could identify who was what.

ESPINO:

Did you ever feel like you could speak out against some of those conditions?

TOVAR:

I did. Let me tell you. I had forgot to tell you this. I did speak up, and the right away the union steward approached me. Would I want to be a union representative? I said, "Well, I'm about to leave. I'm about to leave to go back to school." As a matter of fact, I really begged for the job. That's the only time I ever begged for a job, because they told me that when I filled out the application that I was overqualified. I said, "But I don't have any money. I want to go back to school." I guess they felt sorry for me, and they said, "Okay, we'll try you out." I was good. As a matter of fact, I don't know if I told you how I almost broke the union contract without meaning to.

00:33:33

ESPINO:

Oh, right, yes.

00:35:37

TOVAR:

When I was too fast, and they said, "Hey, slow down. You're going to break our contract in terms of when we can get bonuses." So that was another lesson I learned in terms of contracts, agreements, because since I paid all my way through college, I think one of the things I learned was to try to be as convincing as I could that I was going to be a good employee, because, remember, I was also subject to the possibility of not being hired because I was a Latina. There was that discrimination unless you were the low-paying job, which this was a low-paying job, $1.05 an hour, and you really worked your head off. But the one thing that I sometimes chuckle in terms of me getting a job was when I was at Valley College. I, again, was short on money, so I had taken four years of Spanish in high school, and I went to the Spanish department because I found out that they had a student job. I went and I interviewed, and I guess that afternoon they told me I had the job. I went around eleven, and by three they told me I had the job, and by four they had given me my assignment. They had asked me in the interview, "Do you know how to type?" Yes, which I did. "You know to format a letter?" I said, "Yes." You know, all those things they teach you in typing. So then I went at three, and they said, "You got the job. Now we want you to type this test, and we

want you to do stencil it and make□," I've forgotten, maybe fifty copies. I said, "Oh, okay." "Can you do that?"

"Oh, yes. Oh, yes." I didn't know what stenciling was. I had no idea how to do it. So I quickly ran to the business department where my typing teacher had been, and he was closing the door. He was about to leave for home. I said, "Oh, please. Please, can you teach me how to stencil?" He said, "Oh, yes, Irene. Come back tomorrow, I'll teach you." "No, no, right now! Right now!" He said, "Why?" I told him, and he said, "Okay, Irene, come on in." So he taught me how, one time, and I focus on it so carefully. I said, "Oh, I've got to learn right now because that's the only chance I had," because he was on his way out. He taught me how to do it. I went back, I typed it in the way he told me, and I was so nervous. But you know what? I didn't misspell one single word, which was not usual. I didn't miss one single word in the typing. I ended up doing the stencil. The next morning I came up with it, and you know what? That was the most nervous thing. I thought the world was going to open, (Spanish phrase), and I was going to sink in because I had lied. I had lied that I knew how to do the stencil. (Laughs)

ESPINO:

That's what you were worried about.

00:37:48

TOVAR:

That's what I was worried about. You're young. You want so badly to make it, and I lied. My god, my parents had taught me, "You do not lie. You tell the truth." As a little kid, I remember, "If you don't, the earth will swallow you." (Laughs) But I made it, and you know what? That professor was my friend till the very end of his days. I treasured him. I loved him. He was such a wonderful person. He would kid me sometimes. I said, "You know what? If it wasn't for you I would not have finished college. You helped me," because that was the money that helped me to go right back to school.

So there was always challenges, but my desire to get a college education was so strong that I had to do and work my way through, but I had all these other things that distracts you from really having a normal college life. I didn't go four□it took me longer to finish my college education because I had interruptions. I had to stop and earn money in order to go back to school, so it was difficult. But I think it's worth it. That's the thing I tell young kids. Now, hopefully, you don't have to go through what I went through, and yet there still are barriers. There still are barriers, but don't give up. Be persistent. Be persistent. Because first of all, I truly believe that education is the greatest equalizer. That will change your life like it did for me. It will open your life to so many things that you would never have seen, never would have experienced. The quality of life changes. Your image of yourself changes. Your self-worth that you can support yourself, you can support a family. The quality□well, I don't know if you can say this in this era right now. You can have your home. We were always renting, and tenants are not all□my parents were very diligent. My mother and dad always believed you leave the house better than when you entered. We ended up painting the house. We ended up making it look better, cleaner, and everything, but we were still tenants. We would wander into some places they didn't want you. "You have too many kids." My parents had four children, so that was too many, and they would tell us. I remember my parents, because we would always travel together. It was my mom and dad and the kids in the car. So when we went looking for renting a car, I remember that they saw the kids, and the lady from the window said, "No, no, no kids. No kids."

00:40:14

ESPINO:

Even before you got out of the car?

TOVAR:

Before we got out of the car. So that was the thing that our family strived for, saving and sacrificing, was to own a home. That was the key, to own a home. So whatever we did, whatever we did without, was for the aim to eventually have our own home. And we did in 1954. We finally after much sacrifices from my parents, we owned a home. We bought a home. It was like day and night. We had something, something that was ours. It was just beautiful. We were so happy. I'll remember the day we walked in. There was no gas yet, because the gas man hadn't come, and my mother had to boil hardboiled eggs, and we ate hardboiled eggs. We were so sick. We got sick because we ate so much hardboiled eggs because that was the only thing that she could possibly have done to cook for us. But those are the kind of things that the sacrifice that makes you appreciate what you then have, and it tells you the importance of education. Our lives, all of our brothers and sisters, have been changed because we did finish our□well, at that time to have a high school education was, I

guess, the equivalence of nowadays having a B.A., because nowadays they say, "You only have a B.A.?" (Laughs)

00:41:43

ESPINO:

That's true.

00:45:08

TOVAR:

So now, "Oh, you have your master's?" Now, master's, yes. Eventually they're going to say, "You just have your master's?" Because the reality is that more and more as we're dealing with high tech, the information era, you will need it. You will need it. What is so alarming to me right now and frightening is that the major cuts that are happening not only in elementary but now in junior community colleges. The whole concept of a junior community college that anyone could go. Whether you finish your high school or not, you could go to a community college. My god, state universities was another liberation for poor kids. Well, what about the UC system? So that eventually more and more of our young people may not be able to afford that. Scholarships are more limited. So what is going to happen to this large population that is going to be they predict, what, in 2020 we're going to probably be the dominant group in this country. What is going to happen? Do we have an uneducated community? That's going to impact not only we as minorities, so-called minorities, but it's also going to impact directly non-minorities, whites, those people that especially hate us will be mostly impacted by not having an educated Latino community. It's alarming. That means that we will not have that middle class that is needed to sustain a country. It's not only the quality within our country, but also to the role we will play worldwide. Look at the challenges that we're facing right now worldwide. Look at what's happening in the world, the Wall Street. I can't right now quote the writer who just wrote a book about if we don't do something right now, we will lose our role in leadership in this country. Worldwide we will become a third-world country because we have not educated our citizenry. We have not trained them to compete with other countries. So I think about, my god, we are in a crisis right now, and we've got to acknowledge it and then really work tremendously fast and hard to change it around, because the time is limited. All those experts in terms of economics and leadership, etc., are telling us that we have never faced this before. They remind us that other great civilizations have also fallen, and there's no reason why this cannot happen to our country. But we think, "Oh, no, it won't happen to us." But look at the indicators that are alarming and that are already forewarning us that we've got to educate every single member of our society, and if we don't, we won't be able to compete with the world, other countries that are doing better than we are doing right now.

ESPINO:

It seems like in looking at today and reflecting back that well, there's a couple of things. One is you were almost swimming against the tide always.

TOVAR:

Yes.

ESPINO:

You had the support of your family, but basically that was it, in school and in university.

00:46:0500:48:2000:50:26

TOVAR:

Yes, it was. It's interesting that you're thinking that, but what my generation faced, and I was in that flow for if you were of low income like me, everything was a challenge. Everything was a barrier. We had to overcome every barrier, whatever it was, and sometimes we

didn't even know how hard the barrier were. We just kept so-called keep on trucking, and we just tried more harder. We had to stop sometimes, but we never lost what we wanted. We always kept that in mind.

I want a college education. I want a better life. I want to help my family. We always thought of helping, helping back our family. So, yes, that's true. Then there was also things that also helped us in terms of the time. Remember, I was at the brink of the end of one era and the beginning of another. Discrimination was happening. The Civil Rights Movement was coming. Jack Kennedy became president. Jack Kennedy, to me and to many, I guess, of my generation, whether we were minority or not, especially if we were college students, meant that we could give something to the country. I remember so clearly the day that he was killed. I was in a political science class, and that day my professor, who was a female, said, "Well, let's go to the cafeteria, in a casual situation, and like I'll lecture you there." So we all went to the cafeteria, and the volume was very low, but you could still hear the music, it was very low, things that were not disruptive. Then all of a sudden there was a break, and the professor picked it up. She said, "Oh, my goodness, something just happened." That's when we heard that Kennedy had been shot. As students, we were just taken aback. We couldn't believe it. Remember, it was a generation that didn't do things like that. It was a generation that yet hadn't had student uprising. We had seen it in South America. We had seen it in other countries, but we had not yet seen it in our country. We were the good kids. We were the kids that everything was in place, even our hair. Everything was in place, and if your hair didn't look right, you were not right or not acceptable. In retrospect, I think it was a very rigid kind of thing. You had to look the same. You had to act the same. You could not challenge. Really, you couldn't.

The Civil Rights Movement was something that really inspired people like me that discrimination had to be fought. Martin Luther King, for me, was a hero. Then Jack Kennedy's death was detrimental. It almost was like it took our virginity, if you want to put it that way. All of a sudden, we were looking at something different. The world was not that perfect world, that there was turmoil, that there was someone capable of killing a president. We didn't think about the presidents that had been killed before in this country. We were just thinking of now. We in our lifetime have seen that a president had been shot, and that also changed our generation. Then the Civil Rights Movement which was also that's when I was at CSUN when I experienced that as a student, and yet when that Civil Rights Movement, it started impacting my professional life. For the first time in 1964, my parents said, especially my dad, "Before I die, I want you to go to Mexico. I want you to see the beauty of Mexico, and don't believe all those things that are written about Mexicans, that we are lazy, that we have no talent and so forth. I want to take you all before you start getting married," because my sister had just gotten married, the first one to get married. He said, "I want to take you because you can see the culture, the language, the history of it. I want you to see my land," because my dad owned some land that he had inherited. So when I came back in October of '64, someone was trying to reach me. Finally, I don't know how, they called. They phoned my home, and I answered. They said, "This is the office of Congressman James Corman." I said, "Congressman James Corman, why? What is that all about?"

"We would like to meet with you." So I said, "Okay." I had no idea, so I went to the office in Reseda, and they wanted to offer me a job as a clerk.

ESPINO:

Someone must have recommended you.

00:52:40

TOVAR:

What happened, I said I had no idea why I was being called. I wasn't involved in so-called political things. But I had been as a student and as a young student, I had been involved in an organization here in the Valley, and as a result of trying to be a teacher, or my career, I had become involved with a county effort. As a result of the Civil Rights Movement at the Los Angeles County Human Relations, there were meetings that were taking place in relationship to minorities. I had become acquainted with them, and I was going to meetings. So that's how they got my name. I was a youth advisor. That's another way that I earned my living as a college student, that on weekends once we would have the Spanish Youth Leadership Conference and we would be taken to Malibu, and I would act as a senior advisor, because I was a college student. We would take high school and junior high school students, Latinos, and we would present them with motivating reasons why they should go to finish high school, why they should go to college. We would bring in the role model Latinos who had succeeded. They would talk to them. We had (unclear) who would talk to them. So I guess that's how they got my name. James Corman at that time was one of the lead congressmen in the civil rights legislation, and he wanted to have very interesting. As you entered the office, he had an African American and he had a Latina to be the greeters of whoever came, as a symbol of the Civil Rights Movement.

So I said, "No, I can't work full-time." They were disappointed. I said, "But I can work part-time." So I worked part-time for Congressman James Corman, and that's where I learned another aspect of my life, that entered my life, and that's politics, a citizen politics.

ESPINO:

Traditional mainstream.

TOVAR:

The mainstream, yes. That's when I learned precincts, that all of us live in a precinct, and that precinct is where we go to vote. That precinct determines the politics of a bigger politics and that politicians do registration mainly where they think that they will get their votes, so that some areas are not really registered or there's a program because that might lead to votes that they don't need or don't want. So I started to learn more about politics with a capital P, and so that I was integrating my political science classes with the reality in it. So my life as a student had the challenge of lack of money, trying to go to school, then work situations that were really hard but taught me serious lessons, and then the ones that taught me about the political, what makes changes in our society, because Congressman Corman had led the legislation on the Civil Rights Movement. He had been the one that□not that he originated it, but that he wrote some of the legislation that became eventually the law of the land on civil rights. I learned that aspect in my life. So it was part of my little storage of knowledge that was coming in from the college of life. Even though it took me longer to go to college, it was always a learning situation for me. I was always learning something. I was always observing and integrating that into my thought process, and I would think about what I had learned that day and how that would make a difference if I used it properly.

00:55:07

ESPINO:

This is such an exciting time too.

00:56:52

TOVAR:

It was. It was so exciting. I felt, even though I had all these barriers in front of me, that that wasn't going to keep me away from getting my education. There was hope that the dignity of being accepted as a minority. All of a sudden I was being invited as a young woman to speak on what it meant to be a minority. What was it? Since I was involved, I could contribute something to those discussions. So I was often asked to come in and speak about that. It reinforced all the things my parents had taught me. Always they were the key factor in whatever I did. They were my main teachers. They were my main motivators. They were my support system. They were everything to me, in terms of me keeping going. But also, too, now came another element, the nation, how the nation was changing, how all of a sudden discrimination was not going to be accepted, and all of a sudden jobs were available. Now I was not thinking of being a clerk in case they discriminated against me, and if they did, I knew where to go to appeal those discrimination practices. So all of a sudden, we had certain rights. If they did do that to us, we could appeal. There were ways of putting in our complaints of discrimination. That was something new. Fair housing, they couldn't discriminate against you because you were Latino, even though, unfortunately, it still remained. But it was a beginning. It was a beginning to know there were procedures that could lead you to right your grievance.

There was hope. There was the Peace Corps. I had wanted to go to the Peace Corps, but I know that would have been an even greater sacrifice for my family, not so much economically, but eventually would have because I would have gotten a job. But also, too, my family emotionally didn't want me to go, and I wanted to go, and I respected my parents' feelings, so I did stay. But I wanted to join the Peace Corps.

ESPINO:

Oh, you did ask them?

TOVAR:

Yes, I did.

ESPINO:

Do you remember that conversation?

TOVAR:

It was short because my mother started sort of becoming teary-eyed, and I couldn't face my mother, that I would make my mother cry. How could I possibly make my mother cry? So it wasn't a very long-lasted conversation. I gave in. But I don't regret it. I wish I could have gone, but I don't regret it. I feel better that I didn't cause any emotional hurts to my mother, especially my mother. Of course my dad did, too, but he was a little bit more contained in it, but in terms of it.

ESPINO:

It sounds like he was protective of you as a woman.

TOVAR:

Yes.

ESPINO:

Was he the same way with your brother?

00:59:0401:01:14

TOVAR:

I think he protected me as a woman because his era believed in the protection of the woman, right? He knew. He understood. He considered me a strong person, but he still felt protective as a woman. My brother had obviously much more freedoms, but I can't complain. It wasn't like I seen in other families where the boy can do anything and everything, and even things that shouldn't be supported, and the women, the girls, had to almost surrender to the brother. The brother even though he might be younger, was the man and therefore□that never, never happened in my home, never. My brother did learn to do some things that so-called were called women's things, but it was more the protection, I think, of my father.

We had other things, both my brother and us, of the world that, unfortunately, poverty brings, because some lessons of life I learned after I was a grownup woman. They were right there in my neighborhood, but my dad protected us from seeing those things or knowing them. Even though as far as rights, your rights, your human rights, my dad always taught us a lesson and always, always the dignity of the human being and that we always had to do whatever we could in whatever way or manner we could do it to protect it and respect it. That I did. I remember my dad, we would sometimes when you would come around a little after three o'clock when you would arrive from work, and we would be arriving from school and the TV was on and they were showing how the dogs during the Civil Rights Movement were being thrown at African Americans, how indignant he felt and how he expressed his feelings. Obviously that impacted us too. He said, "You don't treat people like that," and he was very sensitive to discrimination and to what you should do and that you should do whatever you could to not accept it. But the era of me as a student had hardships, there's no doubt about it, but at the same time there was the Civil Rights Movement gave us a lot of hope as minority. There was an instructor at CSUN that organized a controversial club. It was called the Human Relations Club. Think about it, a Human Relations Club as being controversial. We were the only club that had□I think we had about two African Americans. We had about three or four Latinos, and we had some whites, liberal white students. That made the core of the club.

We marched when Martin Luther King was here, and that's when I met some Chicanos who were also involved in the march, and they became friends for life. That's, I think, also, too, when some of us became more visible without intending to be visible to people like Corman and other people who were progressive in the era, and they wanted to highlight our lives, our comments about how we were perceiving our lives, and how we could change them. So that's what, also, too, makes me hopeful always. In a struggle there will always be men and women of all colors who really are willing to sacrifice or stand up for things that are not right or discriminatory or deprive people of their dignity. That's where I cannot say I hate this-color people, that-color people. There's always good people in all groups. Sometimes some of them dominate more, unfortunately, but then there's always some that are really fantastic human beings, just plain human beings that want to do the right thing.

ESPINO:

So this was a white teacher who formed this club?

TOVAR:

That's right, it was a white teacher. Keep in mind, we had approached□five of us had approached□I won't name the person because it became a very well-known person. We approached this professor, Latino, and he didn't think we should have a club. There was this wonderful woman who was a professor, and she did form the club and we did do our thing on campus.

01:03:04

ESPINO:

But you came as Chicanos to this professor?

TOVAR:

Well, at that time the word was not "Chicanos." I'm using the word now, but at that time was Mexican Americans, as Mexican Americans.

ESPINO:

And then you went to this other professor as a group of Mexican Americans.

TOVAR:

That's right, yes.

ESPINO:

Then she formed the Human Relations?

TOVAR:

Yes, Human Relations Club. It was the Human Relations Club. But that was an integrated one. It had African American, the few of us that were there on campus, because CSUN was known as a white. It was called a white lily college. That's how it was called, because we were conspicuous in our absence. But there were decent human beings there. And I want to be fair, too, because that's when I met our wonderful professor who was white, who was a history teacher and studied Native Americans. He connected us as Mexican Americans with a Native American history. I already knew this, but he reminded us that we were Mestizos. I said, "I know. I know. My dad told me." (Laughs) So those were the teachers that gave me support and hope and also helped me not hate everybody, not hate. Maybe dislike, but not hate. Maybe disappointment, but not hate. I think, not knowingly, that was healthy for me. That also made me believe like my parents had hope, that there is hope for a better future for all of us. Very strikingly, there's no doubt that they taught me. My parents taught me, and others at CSUN started forming this concept that there were ways, active ways, that there were ways that we could challenge those discrimination efforts. And the Civil Rights Movement helped us know that we did have right and that we could complain and there was a way that we could right those wrongs. So that also gave you another way.

Well, I have every right. I have a right to stand right here along with you, and you cannot deny me that, and I will not go back. I will not go back. I will not. For the African American, the symbol of the back of the bus became the symbol. Maybe not using the bus, but "I will stand here. This is my place. You have no right." It was a strong feeling, and it gave me, it gave us the courage later on in my involvement in the community to fight it, and to fight it the way I knew that we could win, or that if they did violate it, they were the ones that were going to have to bear the burden of explaining or say why did they do that. The Civil Rights Movement, without a doubt, gave us also courage for some of us that if African Americans did it and they were willing to fight those dogs and willing to fight the KKK and willing to stand against the establishment, then we could also do it too. My dad had told me that in the revolution it had taken place, but then this was in the United States. This was where we could also fight it, and maybe differently, maybe differently. But it was a beautiful era. With me, my education and the beginning of my professional life almost happened at the same time, because I was still a college student and I was working for Congressman Corman, which was work, but it was a different type of work like the one I had in the factory. In the factory, it was work with a lot of injustices. Here it was looking to correcting injustices. Here was a legislator that was helping to create or write laws that gave the struggle, the civil rights struggle, its benefits out of that struggle.

There was a president there that also inspired you, that you were a generation of "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." Those were words that really made you feel so useful, a generation that could make a difference from what we had been living like. So that was important to us. I worked at the same time that I was active in the community, at the same time that La Raza was also making certain changes in their condition, their social condition. I had the privilege of meeting some of the key Chicano□well, at that time Mexican American; I should put it at the words at the time□Mexican Americans struggle for bilingual education, for having teacher aides, which now is so accepted. I mean, it's a given that you will have a teacher's aide, but all those were struggles. They were struggles. We had to struggle to convince the Board of Education that there should be a paraprofessional in the classroom, that there should be a parent in the classroom. "Oh, my god, a parent in the classroom with a teacher? That's going to lower the standards of the school and the teaching." And we had a struggle for that. Now it's parents' involvement. Now we encourage it. We understand that a child will benefit more if their parents are more involved.

The struggle with bilingual. How dare they? You mean we will not have our mouth washed with soap, that now they will look to our language as an asset to transition into English, and that the two language are valuable? Unfortunately, not everybody has accepted that concept still up to now, but that was a beginning. I mean, that was different than having your mouth washed if you spoke Spanish. That was a struggle. I remember some of the board members, Tinglof, Mary Tinglof, which are the most progressive board member. There was another one, Georgiana Harding, who was also one of the more progressive. She's a little bit more moderate. But they were accepting what we were bringing before the board on how to look at children who were bilingual, children who were minority, the quality of the classes or the resources of the classes. All those were being examined for the first time by us in a much more acceptable way. We would fill the Board of Education auditorium with parents and people like Marcos de Leon, who was the one that taught us as activists about what it is to be bicultural, that you have one foot here in the Anglo world and another foot here in the Latino Mexican American world, and what does that do to your psychic? I had never thought of it that way he was telling us. He was an anthropologist, and, my goodness, I had never thought of it. Here we were sitting Mondays at the Los Angeles County Human Relations Office learning about us. Phil Montes, who was a school psychologist and eventually became the director of the Civil Rights Commission, here we were dealing with Dr. Miguel Montes, who eventually became the first Chicano to be appointed to the State Board of Education. I mean, these were the people that we were meeting and getting to know.

I was meeting attorneys who were Mexican Americans who going before the board articulating the issues of our community, and not only in education but in employment. We were learning that if we were discriminated, we could complain. There was a method to doing it and there was a formation at that time of the state employment, the office that dealt with discrimination and employment. Housing and discrimination in housing, we were learning about it. There was a woman, Audrey Kaslow, Chicana, who eventually became the federal commissioner for discrimination and employment. All those were new things that were happening to us.

ESPINO:

I'm sorry to interrupt. I'd like to just step back a little bit. That's a really important commission. Do you remember the date that you started that? Was it the Mexican American Education Commission that you were involved in, or was that something separate?

TOVAR:

That group, let me tell you how that group was formed. Because of the Civil Rights Movement, the responsibility□the county, for whatever reason, was given the task of develop these committees. The same thing that was happening to us was happening to African Americans. So we developed. We were called upon. The director was an African American, Buggs, his name was. He was incredible, an incredible man. He got us all together and he told us that our task was as activists, because we were known as activists, to participate in an effort to make the Civil Rights Movement a more reality through various committees. The function of these committees would be defined by us once we described what our problems were in the community. There was an Education Committee, there was a Housing Committee, there was an Employment Committee, and I can't remember. There was one more. I can't remember right now the other one.

01:13:34

ESPINO:

Health, would it be?

TOVAR:

Interesting enough, health was not one. I can't remember what the other one was, but at least those were the three key ones that we were dealing with. Obviously, I was an education major, wanted to be a teacher, so I came. I belonged to the Education Committee. We met once a week. We met on Mondays around six o'clock, seven o'clock, sometime. Our first task was to define our issues. The next task was to define where we would go to resolve those issues, and then how would we resolve those issues. So besides identifying those problems that existed in that particular field, we would then obviously develop a plan of action. Let's call it a plan of action because we had to do something. Among them was a thing that we did with the institution, such as the Board of Education, but also two programs that we worked with those institutions. At that time, as you know, the Civil Rights Movement also had a large increase of people from the Jewish community who participated with us. Those resources and other resources, not only from the Jewish community, came into play, to work with those proposed plans of action. So one of them, besides us going to the Board of Education and having a recommendation of issues that they should take care of, which ended up creating the Mexican American Commission□I don't know if you're aware of that. That commission worked with the school directly, authorized by the school as an official arm of making changes for bilingual children.

01:15:36

ESPINO:

The school district.

TOVAR:

The school district. That was one of the recommendations which came in to flourish. In that was the battle of bilingual education, was the issue of getting parents involved, because the school system believed that parents, Mexican parents, did not believe in the education of their children, which was absolutely wrong, and we proved them wrong. But we had to provide a vehicle, an advocacy for that to occur. So I'm just giving you two samples of it. But the third one that occurred was what was called the Mexican American Youth Leadership Conferences, and that's where we worked with the school to give us the names of students who were□first of all, we decided that everybody always looks to the A student. We said, "Okay, we have a big dropout problem. Maybe some of those kids need inspiration, people who thought of them in a positive way." Because the school district had told us, "We have a drastic dropout rate, but these are kids who don't care about their education. No, they're never going to change." At a junior high school, they had given up on them. We said, "Oh, no, no, no, no. You do not give up on these kids. They're young." So we told the school, "You give us the names of D students, D students, students who you think are going to drop out of school, and we want those students." At the same time, there was the owner of a Camp Hess Kramer in Malibu who said, "We will let you have our camp for a weekend." We had already wanted to have them for a weekend and have some speakers, get them out of the barrio, get them into a different venue, like open air, fresh air, that kind of thing.

01:17:28

ESPINO:

Nature.

01:19:2801:21:5501:23:5801:25:42

TOVAR:

Nature. We will have them for a week, and we'll start on Friday. We convinced the schools to get us buses. We would bus the kids to Malibu to this camp. Some of us would be like me; I was a youth advisor. And we had teachers who belonged to this committee, Education Committee, and we formed a program. They came on Friday, and between Friday and Sunday we would bombard them with motivational speakers. We would tell them how important they were. We would give examples of dentists, for example, or nurses or doctors or lawyers who had had a problem with math and who had struggled and who had all given up and would drop out, and had come back and now they were attorneys or nurses or whatever, because we really searched out for them, and just pump them with that, feed them. What was interesting, my first experience, which I still get a little bit choked up, is that the Friday the kids arrived, we got them in the bungalows. Then right across the street was a beach. There was a kid who cried, who was a gang kid. He had never seen the ocean. He had only known two blocks, from his home to the school and the school to his home. That was his life. There had never been anything else. Here he was in a bus. He was being treated like a human being. He was in the ocean. Think about that. Think about that. If anything, anything made us feel that we were doing the right thing, it was that. I still, as I'm telling this, I'm getting choked up about this, this young kid. What would his future would have been? You know what? Every now and then I may be in the street and someone would recognize me, said, "Aren't you Ms. Tovar?" "Oh, yes."

Says, "You know, I changed my life as a result of that. I'm now on my B.A.," or, "I've finished school," some trade, something. That's what we tried to teach the school. You do not give up on a kid. You never, never give up on a kid. They were giving up at junior high. "My lord," I said, "we can't." The tragedy is, if you look now, we're not too far from where we started at that time. What a tragedy. We're losing our greatest resources, a young human being. We cannot do that. We just cannot do that. That's a precious life. Ser humano, the concept that my parents taught me about, the value of a human being. You do not give up on a human being. The schools were doing that, and they cannot do it. They have an obligation and a duty to not give up on our young people, and we have to be indignant as citizens, as people. I don't care whether you're legally legal or whatever, that's a human being. That's a valuable□the value my parents had put on life is so great, that to me I'm insulted. My greatest insult, you don't give up on a human being. You don't give up on a kid. That kid had only known two blocks, two blocks, from home to school and from school home. So therefore everything became significant in the two blocks, and if his pal got hit, that was the most valuable thing, because that's all his world were. So we create gangs. We create "That's the only people that care about me. The school doesn't care about me. They let me go. My parents don't know how to control me," and so forth. So what chances, what options, what opportunities are we giving to our young people? We do have an obligation. That's the other thing. We have the duty to speak up. We have a duty to demand things, because we've paid for it. That's the other thing. Nobody is giving us anything. Not only in life that we've had our (unclear).

You know what's so sad? Every Sunday I see this program at eight o'clock in the morning that talks about what's happened to the United States, the status, and at the end of it they have a memoriam, and they list the soldiers that have died in that week. There isn't a week that goes by that there isn't a Spanish surname attached to that list. So we've given our lives for this country. I pay taxes. Nobody said Chicanos and minorities do not pay taxes. I pay property taxes. Under property taxes, as you know, goes education, goes sewers, goes buildings, those sort of things. Then the other thing is that we live in this country and it has given us inalienable rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. So I'm fighting for my rights. So nothing is given. We're not coming here as with our hat in our hands. That's the important symbol. My parents said, "(Spanish phrase). This is your country. So you do not come hat in hand, like when you come that you're humbled, that you don't have anything. You have a lot, and you have to fight for what you have. If you don't, you have forfeited. You have given it up. So you have to make sure that you retain those rights. You have to keep them. Democracy is something that can very easily go away if you don't protect it and you don't fight for it." So that was what that committee did. It helped so many young people get back and believe in themselves, because they saw positive role models. They saw that we believed them, and that we cared about them, that they could contribute to our society, that they were not loser, that they were smart.

Yes, it does take you to open those books, we told them, and, yes, there's no such a thing as□like sometimes I was a good student, and "Oh, Irene is so smart." Yes, but Irene opened her book. I used to tell students when I've had opportunity to speak to them, "How many of you boys and girls are athletes?" Well, some of them will raise their hands. "Okay. How many of you like to see football and (unclear)? What makes them good? Well, they train. Okay. They train. What is it? Is it the heart? Oh, it's tough. Okay. Now, how many of you put your book in your head, and you transfer from here to here the knowledge that's in that book? There isn't such a thing. You have to open it, you have to read it, you have to spend time looking at it, and when you don't know, don't be ashamed to ask. Don't be ashamed." Because some, "Well, I don't like to ask. I feel dumb." Nothing is more dumb like not asking the question. So you have to reinforce them that it's okay, that it's okay if you say, "I don't know or I don't understand. Could you repeat that again? Could you tell me in a different way?" I said, "I say it and I'm a grownup woman." This is when I'm talking to young kids. I said, "I'm not ashamed to say I don't know. I'm not ashamed to say, 'Could you please teach me how?' It's okay. And you're young people. You're just learning life like I was learning life." And that helps.

So we have to care a lot for our young. We have to really work with them all the way through, because what the pattern is that parents go to elementary days when the kids are going to perform, when they're going to do this and that. Then as they get older, junior high, parent involvement starts dropping off, and then high school. But it really should be all the way through, all the way through, because there are

barriers in junior high and there's barriers in high school and there's barriers to even when you go to college. When you go to college, you support them. One of the experiences I had when I worked at CSUN, because eventually I worked for three years at CSUN after a turmoil, student turmoil, where apparently the students had negotiated. The few minority students that had come in and had negotiated with the administration to bring the EOP program into that campus, and apparently they played a little game on the students, on the African and (unclear) students. So what happened is that they burned the building. They burned the Administration Building. That got the attention and the seriousness that there was a need for the EOP program, which was the Education Opportunity Program.

ESPINO:

It wasn't a protest that□

01:28:0801:29:45

TOVAR:

Yes, it was a protest. It had started first as a protest, that negotiations weren't going the right way. They kept on pushing and pushing, and finally the administration decided not to do it, and that's when the students and□some of the students were in the building as a protest assembled. I mean, why would you push? Why would you push students to that degree when they were talking about education opportunities, the EOP program, which were part of the Civil Rights Movement results about education opportunities for young kids. So by then I was out of school, and they called on some of us in the community because we were active, and they wanted to see how we could be the intermediaries, communicate with the Chicano Movement, Chicano students, and the African American leadership with the African American students. So as a result of that, I was hired to be the liaison between the community and the campus.

It was interesting that when our young girls, especially, went to school, some of them did have problems getting the support of their parents, because all of a sudden they were away from home. Some of them were living in the dorms. The parents and the fathers didn't know what they were doing. So we had some serious issues, not all of them, but some very serious issues where the girls would come in tears, crying that their parents, especially the father, had not wanted□"How do I know who's in those apartments and where you are, and why don't you come home on the weekend?" "Well, I have a term paper, Dad, and the library is closed there," you know, that sort of thing. So what we did was an Open House and we invited the parents, and we described what college life was like. We had to educate our parents, because first generation, they don't know those things. We wanted to help the parents be supportive of their students, to encourage them to remain, to know that they were going to have sacrifices and that sort of thing, and for them to be a resource, a positive resource like my parents had been. Even though I had had many barriers put in front of me, my parents were there with me all the way through. Many, many parents started to understand the role of a college student. It was the first time that anyone in their family had ever gone to college, and that was a different change, and the students needed the parents. (Interruption)

TOVAR:

That the parents are needed all the way, and they felt that they were valuable too. See, they felt that their role was valuable as far as parents, even though their kids were sort of grown up. But they were going through a new experience, a new, completely new lifestyle, that there was no anything to refer back to as reference. So that, I think, was a valuable□and I remember sometimes some parents were a little bit difficult. So then I would go visit them at home. The father played it very tough, more than the mother. The mother was more supportive, by the way. It was interesting what I found. Then afterwards when finally the father would□I would try to think of every answer I could to convince the father, and then at the end when he finally would give in, he'd say, "Okay, Miss Tovar, but if anything happens to my daughter, I will come to you to hold you responsible." I'd go, "Oh, my god. What have I got myself in?" Then I would go back to the girl, I said, "Don't you ever do anything that will get me in trouble with your father." (Laughs)

ESPINO:

That's a lot of responsibility.

01:31:21

TOVAR:

It is, it is, but it was worth it because it meant that young girl stayed in school, it meant that young girl graduated from school, and it meant that the parents were also learning something about their kids, what the changes were occurring in life.

I see college education for minorities as a quiet revolution. It's a revolution because it will change their lives completely, and that's what a revolution does. It changes them completely, everything, how they look at life, how they see life, what they will experience in life, not only the financial material changes will be for them, and it will be the change. Education, to me, breaks the chain of poverty. It breaks it. It gives dignity to the human being, because to be poor, to be treated as second, third citizen, not to be respected, not to be the voices, not to have value, not to be heard, that is not adding dignity to the human being, again to the value of the human being, you know, human dignity. And that's important in a human life, how you feel about yourself. I often thought, gee, if I hadn't been an anthropologist, I would have studied folk music, Mexican folk music, because think about the songs that deal with there's many songs that deal with poverty. They may not have called it poverty, but if you read how the man or the woman react to each other or deal with each other, it's telling you a lot about human values, the lack of dignity if you're poor. It's very interesting. I said, gee, if someone is a sociologist or anthropologist should study the Mexican folk music. That's interesting.

ESPINO:

As far as having a negative viewpoint?

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TOVAR:

Well, it has both positive and negative. Some of it is very, very touching in terms of how relationships survive, despite poverty. It's very uplifting. It's very tragic but it's very uplifting. In others it's very sad because of what poverty does when there isn't education, how people who are poor, that there's no structure for them to grieve. They take it upon themselves, and there's death. They kill each other, and there's no way of resolving differences. There's no such a thing as gun control. What's gun control? (Laughs) I'm being silly there, but, really, there's nothing. If the institutions would take responsibility, if the governments would take the responsibility of dealing with the issues of the poor, there wouldn't be those.

Also, too, there sometimes things that are very sad, such as the role of the woman. I always refer to one song when I want to magnify the issue of the woman in the Latino world. A girl refusing to dance with a guy, she ends up being killed because of his image. How will they think of him that he's been rejected by this woman? So you say, my god, how and then you see other things such as the problems of alcoholism, what alcoholism does in all these folk music songs, and who's addressing the need to deal with alcoholism? Even in this country, as you know, years ago, and I cannot quote you how long ago that was, but at the County Hospital the greatest death among psoriasis of the liver was among Latinos because of alcoholism. We have to deal with that issue, too, what poverty does. Keep a watch on weekends, you'll see this man with heavy boots full of dirt or cement and all, his work clothes, and it's obvious by looking that he worked in really hard work. His car looks like he may not have all the money in the world. And he walks into Rite-Aid and he comes out with a huge pack of beer. You look at the price that it's advertised, and Rite-Aid has a whole bunch of ads up front of how inexpensive it is to buy all this kind of beer. You say, my god, this man, that's his only way of really letting go of this horrible hard work he's doing. That's his only outlet. He may not be able to take his kids to Disneyland or he may not be able to do this or that, but a can of beer is understood. But the consequences of it is bad. But what does he have to do to let go on a weekend when he's been working so hard in the physical hard work? I know my dad worked in those kind of jobs. So I know what it takes. And what outlet do you have? It's a very I don't know how to put it but a very difficult thing. At the same time you understand it, but you know the consequences. But what options does this man have or this woman have?

There's many things that both men and women who are poor have to deal with. You deal with the issue of obesity, and you see people who are poor, and you see that they have an overweight problem. You wonder, well, why aren't they thin? They must eat a lot. Well, what do they eat? The cheapest, potatoes, things that are not the most healthiest that throw off your you know. You want to buy what kind of a healthy food is it, it's expensive. If you buy maybe fish, look at fish. That's kind of expensive. You don't buy that. Think about all the vegetables that you want to go eat. So you choose whatever is most inexpensive for your family. What did we use to do in my home? My mother used to buy ground meat or meat that she could cut into small pieces and (Spanish phrase) so that we could all eat. It's a different thing to be poor. You have to look at the world differently in terms of your economics too. I remember one good-intentioned lady. "Well, let's teach them how to budget." (Laughs) Okay, you want to teach them how to budget when they're barely making it? (Interruption)

01:38:28

TOVAR:

Stop me if I'm rambling.

ESPINO:

No, no, no, not at all. I don't want to interrupt you. Everything you say is really important. You had mentioned earlier how education is the silent revolution or through education you achieve a silent revolution.

TOVAR:

Yes, I believe that is a silent revolution, yes.

ESPINO:

And the Chicano Movement, because you were a part of that whole moving, like you say, from obedient to somebody who spoke out, do you think that there's a certain kind of education that needs to happen or just education in general?

TOVAR:

Oh, no.

ESPINO:

Because the Chicano Movement was also part of giving back to your community, teaching kids to be aware.

TOVAR:

That's right. That's right.

ESPINO:

Can you talk a little bit about that and the kind of education that you mean when you refer to it?

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TOVAR:

When I'm talking about education, Virginia, I'm talking about that it's the breaking of the chain of poverty, all of those elements, all of those social elements that affect poverty. Education to me, too, is also, too, a quiet revolution because it's liberating you from all these other things. Then what kind of education may be the next question. It's the education. First it started off with giving you self-value, self-respect for who you are. Remember, we're talking about beginning with the little ones from the start, getting them to feel that they can do whatever they want. But they do have to. Like I said, no, you cannot do it by osmosis. You've got to break that book.

But also, too, they need support in that process. They need to really have a system that helps them succeed that includes their parents, but we also have to work with their parents. That's a difference too. It's not like a lawyer taking his son to elementary school and therefore that child is already hearing even legal terms and legal terminology and maybe that, "Oh, yes, you can sue." Our people sometimes don't even know. Most of them don't know that you can bring charges if you have had something done in your school that violates your child. So that's why we have to work with parents in terms of not only learning how to sue, but learning how they can help their child learn the value of reading, how can they get books. That's, in itself, another challenge. Books are expensive. In Head Start, where I was a director of it, a parent had to make a choice between a book and milk, and what choice is he going to make? The milk, right? Not because he or she doesn't care about the child, but milk is a survival issue, and books, to them, becomes a luxury. How sad. So what are we doing about that? How are we making books more easily available to preschoolers, to other children? Those very simple things that we take for granted, I mean, we assume, we make a lot of assumptions. But when you are poor, those are very serious things that you have to make choices and that affect the quality of life of that child.

What kind of counseling there is both in junior high, high school, and in college. Just now I'm fighting□we were trying to communicate with a community college that we need counselors who are there when the students make appointments, because in the past there's been college counselors who make appointments with their students and don't show up for the appointment. That student, "Okay, all right, now I'm going to have to set another appointment," right? But now that student may not have transportation. How does he come back again at a time that is convenient for the counselor? We have those situations where we've dealt with and we've talked to those students directly, and the major thing is a good counselor to guide first-generation college students. So those things are important. Yes, we have to have an education for first-generation college students. We have to have education for students who are for the first, like we were. My parents, there are still parents like my parents, who came from Mexico or whatever Latin American country, and had their education cut off, never had the experience of going to finishing their education primaria, let alone secondaria. Forget about universidad. So now they come to this country, they want the best for their children, but how do they help them if they don't have the tools that tells them how to? So it is more challenging. I don't say it's a problem. It's more challenging, and it's more creative. This is where it can get exciting to those people that believe in this. It's a great opportunity to think of new ways of integrating these parents in the future of their child. But if you look at it as it's a problem, then you're not going to put your heart into it, because it needs not only the tools, but an educator who really believes in it and is excited about it, that sees it as something exciting, as something that's challenging their profession. It's something that they can teach others. So, to me, it's exciting. It is not easy. It is challenging, but I don't think anything worthwhile is easy, anything that's worthwhile. Think about something you really wanted and that you knew that it could be easily given to you, but once you accomplished it, you loved it, you treasured it, you were so proud of it. The same thing can happen in this, and we have to do a lot of that right now because we are, as I told you, in an educational crisis. We are, and it's tragic.

When in a democracy could you think of not having higher education for your child, an opportunity to change their life, to so-called if I may use the American Dream title? Is there an American Dream right now? It looks very, very removed from our community. So we have to, we who say we're activists, we say our community concern, we who graduated from an era that said we had to give something back to the community, have to really get involved. We have to be there at the Board of Education meetings, at Community College Board of Trustees meetings, like many of us have done here. We have to get involved even in the UC. They should see us. They should see us, those trustees that are very prestigious. Usually they're very well-off people, very corporate people, you know. Let them see us. Let them know that we care. Let them know that we are holding them accountable, because really they're accountable to whoever appointed them. That's who they have been accountable to. Now let them be accountable to the community.

So I really believe very firmly that it is a quiet revolution. You don't need to use guns. You don't use (unclear). You can do it by making sure you hold them accountable, those that are there and being paid, paid to educate our children, and that they have to be creative, they have to find ways, because that's their responsibility. We will be there to augment that effort, to help them when they come back home and they're with us, but they have a responsibility where they have our kids in their trust. That's how we should view it. I know our culture respects so much a teacher and that sometimes the parents don't question the teacher. That's how we were taught, right? But it's not right here. Our teachers should be challenged. We should see why is not my young man making it, or our young lady making it? Why do the reports seem to indicate this versus that? I remember when I was a young girl, even though our parents were very much involved in making sure we got good grades. They would say, (Spanish phrase). They didn't even challenge whether the teacher might be wrong. If the teacher was wrong, it must have been us, because a teacher could do no wrong. Unfortunately, that's something that still some parents believe it. (Spanish phrase) respect that teacher. (Spanish phrase), you know. Yes, we should respect those that teach our children, but we have to hold them accountable. We have to make sure they're doing their job. You see? That's another breakthrough that we have, and that's also part of that quiet revolution, accountability, that we hold them accountable for what are they doing with our kids. If they're not making it, why aren't they making it? There's nothing I have seen that can turn a young kid around if you believe in them, if you support them.

Just a simple weekend that we spent at Camp Hess Kramer turned many kids around from D, F students, because we purposely picked those students. Everybody picks on the A students, but these were the kids that weren't making it, and we were able to turn them. One weekend, by caring about them, by telling them they were important, by telling them, "Yes, you can make it, but you do also have to try. You also have to open those books. You also have to come to school every day." Now, why were they not coming? "Oh, the teacher makes me feel bad," or, "I don't know how to□." They would never admit it, but some of them could not read or write and they were embarrassed now by that age. So they didn't go to school. So there are many reasons why some kids drop out. We have to spend the time and invest finding out why and how can we make them stay. That's a revolution that I support. That's what I want us all to be there, because it's like I know it. Because of my education, I've traveled almost through every major city in the United States. I've had the opportunity to travel aboard. I've had the opportunity to meet some of the most devoted people to human rights. I belong to the National Urban Coalition in which I sat right across from Roy Wilkins and other black leaders of the Civil Rights Movement and non-minority men and women who believed in the dignity of all of us, irrespective of color. I mean, when would I have had that chance? I've met with presidents. I worked for a governor. I was his special assistant. I sat on boards and commissions that made policies that impacted our community. Had I not had that education, I would have never had that opportunity. Now I see a governor, a president, I respect their

position, but, hey, I'm comfortable talking to them. "Hey, Governor, this is an issue," and I'm not afraid to meeting with them.

That has to do with how you feel about yourself, how you feel that you're a worthy human being, and we've got to make our community feel that way so that they can feel that they have every right to speak to a governor, to speak to a president, to speak to anybody who will impact their life, and to participate. I am right now participating. I just got appointed to be in the committee that will select the next president of CSUN by alumni. When would I have had that opportunity?

ESPINO:

That's a powerful position.

01:52:4401:55:1401:57:29

TOVAR:

It's important, not for my□I feel good that I was, but it's not my ego that I'm dealing with. It's how can I contribute. Again to the concept of giving back to your community. It doesn't only mean like I have done in the past, voter registration drive. I've been right there walking the precincts and getting bitten by a Chihuahua dog, which I was bitten by a Chihuahua dog. I said, "You traitor." (Laughter) It was because, again, a professor in psychology told our class, animals sense fear. So I saw the little Chihuahua dog coming toward me from the house that I was going to register someone. I said, "Oh, I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid." I walk right through. I said, "Let alone a little Chihuahua dog." Would you believe it? Very wise little Chihuahua dog, kept barking, barking, barking, and went around me, and then when he was around me, that's when he bit me. (Laughs) I said, "Boy, that professor, I'm going to go talk to him about his theory of fear and dogs."

But you do have a responsibility to contribute, whether it's walking a precinct, whether it's getting out the vote, whether it's volunteering in the school with your kids, or even if you don't have your kids. Whether it's going to a board meeting, whether it's making a phone call and saying to your congressman, "No, I don't support this," or, "Yes, I support this." Or going to a meeting and them just seeing you physically there has an important impact on what that speaker says. I've been in many situations and I'm there because my presence or the presence of any Chicano may make the difference in terms of how other people react to a situation. So we are important. We are valuable. We do count. But if we're not there, we give up our right. We encourage the conditions to continue. So are the kind of things that don't demand□if you're not a picketer, I was a picketer and I say it with pride. I did walk precincts. I did get out the vote. I did many things, from the very sensitive ones where we had the police around us to now that some of you□I tell some people, if you're uncomfortable of picketing, if you're uncomfortable about X, Y, Z that might□you can always get a little green thing called a check or a money. You can write a little check for a cause. Or you can phone. They won't even see you. You can sign your protest. So there's various avenues in which you can participate. We have to be visible. Look, I just finished going through this redistricting thing for the county and for the state. The data of the 2010 Census says that we in the county were 48 percent of the population of the growth during those ten years from 2000 to 2010. We were 98 percent of the growth, 98 percent of the growth.

When it came to drafting of the plans and we went to the hearings, the first hearings, there were a few of us sprinkling, and the opposition was strong. It was packed all over. They even had to have people outside. So therefore we make it easier for them to then do plans that exclude us. The next time, I talked to some key people. I said, "You mean that we couldn't bring some people here?" The next time, it didn't happen. We were there. So I see hope. I see us making some changes. We had people there. We did fill up at least three-quarters of the auditorium. We did have our speakers. We had our experts who came in and testified. Unfortunately, they still don't get the message that we didn't have the votes we needed to pass the plan that complied with the rules of redistricting. So, unfortunately, we're going to have to sue. But we have to think about this. Think about some people in that board who want to run for higher office to represent us and just finished denying us our rights. We have to have very good memories and we have to really be alert. We have to look at the television and see who's voting what way. We have now so many ways of learning. The information is out there, so we have to pay attention. It's good that we like football on Monday, and it's good that we like some other things, but I think we have to balance it with what's happening politically. What things is my representative doing that's good or bad for me? So those are the things that I think lead to a quiet revolution in our education, in our community involvement, in our political awareness, and that we do have a great stake right now in our future, and that whatever, however way we act now will determine how we're going to be ten years from now.

And what we're doing for our children, I have a lot of nephews and nieces, and I want them to have a better opportunity, I want them to have a better chance in having a fruitful life and valuing their humanness, how important they are. So those are key things that we have to strive for very, very hard. Nothing that has ever come to us as Mexican Americans, as Latinos, has come easy, nothing. I'm just talking about my era, just my era. I'm not talking about those that came before me and those that came after them, you see. So we have a responsibility for those courageous ones that came before us and to make sure that we don't let them down in terms of our effort.

ESPINO:

I think that's a good time to stop, so your little boy can come out and play. (Laughter)

TOVAR:

Yes, he's very good about that.

ESPINO:

Thank you so much. I'm going to stop it here. (End of October 21, 2011 interview)

SESSION THREE (November 23, 2011)

00:00:56

ESPINO:

I wanted to ask you about the Mexican American Education Committee and the Human Relations Commission that helped form that, whatever you can tell me about that. You talked a little bit about that last time, but more detail. Like, for example, you're writing a list of some of the participants and who were the core people that were involved and what were your issues.

TOVAR:

Because remember that the Mexican American Education Committee was right after the Civil Rights Movement, so it's in the mid sixties up to probably toward the end of the beginning of the seventies. Just so that you keep that in mind.

ESPINO:

Right. So that we understand that it was a precursor to the Chicano Movement.

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TOVAR:

That's right, to the movement, exactly. Also, too, it was really an education revolution we did in a quiet way that happened because we were not yet marching. It wasn't yet our culture, our contemporary culture. I think one of the interesting things that we haven't really focused on is the role that the Mexican American Education Committee played in bringing a lot of awareness to the Los Angeles Board of Education about the needs of our children. That Education Committee was part of the creation by John Buggs, who was the executive director of the Los Angeles County Human Relations. The thrust of that movement to develop these committees, because they were happening concurrently with the African American community, was a result of the Civil Rights Movement and the effort to implement what the results have been of the Civil Rights Movement and its legislation. So we were called upon, in the Education Committee, because it was happening concurrently with the Employment Committee, the Housing Committee, etc., but our focus only on the Education Committee because I was very much involved.

We met every Monday at the County Los Angeles Human Relations offices, and we had a consultant from that department who met with us and consulted us and guided us through what our role us. But we definitely were the ones that defined the role as we saw the needs of our community, and that was exactly why we were invited to come to that committee, because we had been involved in some sort of way with education and improving and making the system understand the bilingual/bicultural child. We yet didn't use the term "bilingual/bicultural child" when we began, because we didn't understand it. We just knew that it was a child who spoke another language, that was not being treated equally that was behind, had a high dropout rate, that there was sometimes many, many abuses

toward that child. An example, such as in Pacoima Elementary School where we spoke Spanish, they washed your mouth with soap. They disciplined young boys if they were founding speaking Spanish by using a paddle and hit them in their tush. If you're a young girl or a young boy, they would humiliate you by going in front of a classroom and telling you, "Juanito, do you know how you're being punished?" And poor little Juanito or Juanita would say, "Yes," very humbly, and say, "because I spoke Spanish." They were literally got a ruler and hit on the head.

So those were the kind of things, extreme things, that were happening to our children, and that's why they were dropping out. Why would you go to a hostile environment as a young child? Then continually every year it got worse and worse because you got more and more behind. So we were going to take those issues to task. There was one member who changed and focused our own thinking and clarified it for us, and he was Marcos de Leon. Marcos de Leon, taught, I believe, in Van Nuys High School, and he taught Spanish. He declared himself an anthropologist sociologist. That's how we knew what his training had been. He introduced us to the concept of bilingualism and biculturalism, and he taught us that impact of language on the development of a person and the importance of that language in relationship to your culture and what it meant to be bilingual, bicultural, and that you actually had, he would say, one foot in one border and one foot in this border. So, therefore, at the same time you develop into a truly bilingual person, and some, there was where the struggle began, because the system, the educational system of that time, which were talking about like 1965, '66, '67, did not understand that concept, did not understand the implications of being bilingual, bicultural. So our role became as a committee to educate the L.A. Unified School District about that child and the bilingualism, biculturalism, and how the teachers□and here's the beginning of the change, how the teachers had to understand that child through not only in their actual practice but in the training of them in universities, the preparation of teachers in the understanding that child.

Really, there were hardly, if any, anybody in the education system, in the higher educational system that was training teachers to be bilingual, bicultural. We did some research on other parts of the Southwest that might have been doing something, and what we found at that time is that really the community that was doing things to help that child, maybe volunteers in their local community that organize on their own an Education Committee or through the GI Forum or something like that, that addressed that issue but locally and really starting to begin to try to see if the system would understand it. But, basically, they were like we did in the San Fernando Valley, we raised our own money, by selling, cooking, a bake-out, anything, and then we hired a teacher. I remember her name was Sanchez. I can't remember her first name, but it was Sanchez. She was a teacher, and we hired her to teach bilingual/bicultural children, twenty-five of them. That's all we could afford to pay her for her to teach twice a week, I believe, these preschoolers. But we did it on our own as an organization. We went out and we recruited. We went door to door and talked to the parents in the neighborhood about the importance of preschool. You know what? Contrary to the belief of the public school system at that time that Mexican parents did not care about education, we found□well, we already knew that that was quite to the contrary. The first day of that enrollment, we only could take twenty-five children, and we had children in this park where we had it all around the park, people wanting to have their children. So that was part of the results of this committee of what we were doing on our own. But we had to change the system. So what we did is we got a position paper, and in it, through the influence of Marcos de Leon, we integrate what we thought we could do at that time by, first of all, already making a preamble in terms of what we thought was the problem and then giving suggestions on how we could begin by doing that.

Since we acknowledged and the school, too, acknowledged that there wasn't teachers who understood our children, what we did□and another person that helped us a lot who was a psychologist and was teaching, was a counselor at El Rancho Unified School District, was Phil Montes. At that time that was his role, and he eventually became the civil rights commissioner in Los Angeles, regional director. But, anyway, Phil also through his counseling experience, we came up with that position paper. Some of the things that we proposed, one, since we face the fact that there wasn't teachers who already trained to do that, we could utilize paraprofessionals. The concept of paraprofessionals was part of the result of the Civil Rights Movement in different fields. But we were addressing the educational part. In it we thought that even parents, and, oh, my god, that was such a□parents in the school, in the classroom, how could they? It was really controversial that parents could play a role by being in the classroom and assisting, assisting teachers so that they could even be translators, because many of the children were only monolingual Spanish speakers, so that they would be able to help the child not only through the teacher understanding what this child was talking about, but also almost to help the child have an identity of someone that he or she could identify as a child and understand that bilingual as a parent.

Then, also, too, eventually we talked about what was called the New Careers Program, which was to take paraprofessionals and train them and educate them, and then they could be assistants in the field of education. We introduced that concept also, too, in social work and in all kinds of other social services, but ours was on the education system. We went before the Board of Education and we advocated for those positions, and we tried to educate the school system about the biculturalism of the child, to respect what that child's culture meant, and that that in no way made him, isolated him, actually, introduce him to our American system, and yet you respected the child's background. So now we take them for granted, but those are very, very new concepts to the board. We had board members like Georgiana Harding, Mary Tinglof, who was very progressive in advocating for people of color, for African American, for Latinos. Well, at that time it was Mexican Americans that they were called. As a result of that, we even proposed the formulation a little bit later on of the Mexican American Education Commission, which meant there was a body of citizens who advised the Board of Education on a regular basis and was recognized by the Board of Education to help integrate the school in understanding the needs of the bilingual child and the bicultural child. There were numerous other things that radiated out of that, and, as you know, now we take for granted the parent's aide, the teacher's aide. Those titles were new. They were fought. We had to deal not only with convincing the Board of Education, but, unfortunately, the union. The teachers union felt threatened by it because they felt that that would downgrade the quality of teaching and that they would eventually try to take over the teaching role, which was contrary to what we had conceptualized.

Our concept was that it would be an assistant to the teachers. Now the teachers union, of course, don't see that, in terms of like it was then. So we learned a lot in that effort ourselves, in terms of how the system works and also in terms of advocates. At that time, we in the Chicano community were not necessarily marching. It was an era that we thought we could do it by go through the system, appealing to the system. We yet had on a massive way, of course, in our history of Latinos there has been marches, but at that time it wasn't what the

times were there for us. These were basically members like Gerry Zapata, who was the secretary to the Education Committee, and who was also strong. She was among one of those that testified. We had Arce Torres who would come, and she was the wife of the leader of the UAW at that time. He was the president. We had people like Mike Montes, who eventually became the first Chicano to be appointed to the State Board of Education and eventually played a role, too, in the walkouts with Sol Castro in terms of taking a stand in support of them. We had people like Audrey Kaslow, Audrey Kaslow who came with a very strong background within the federal government and was a parole officer and had dealt with students, young people, and her plead was to understand why did we end up having these young men in prison when they could have, if the system understood them and maybe taught them, they would not have ended in the penal institutions. There was an engineer by the name of Fernando Hernandez, and he was also there.

So we had people that were not only and, of course, there was myself. We met regularly, a very regular basis, and it was an exciting time. It was a time that we felt we could make a difference, that we had experience in our own profession, in our struggles, and we knew what those problems were. So we started making those changes and eventually that was the beginning of the bilingual. As a matter of fact, one of the other things that I almost forgot to mention is that we brought in legislators, the few that we had. One of them was Lopez from San Diego, Leo, who eventually became to be in the State Department of Education. We met with him, and we tried to see that legislation was passed that would include the bilingual/bicultural child help in education and provide funds for that. We also met with the State Department of Education, and there also, too, we talked to Leo Lopez and how would the State Board of Education start understanding the bilingual/bicultural child. In those times, they had never had that kind of interaction with a Mexican American community, so we thought it was a first. We really tried to look at the overall. We talked about the big dropout rate, and the attitude of the Board of Education at that time, "Oh, well, they're gone. They're already gone. There's no use to even focus on them." So you waited for them to drop out. We said, "No. That's a young person. That's thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. How can we give up on a child at that time? So let's look at what the problems are and how can we resolve them. How can we help that child stay in school?" So various programs were initiated that addressed for the first time changing the attitude of, "Well, they're dropouts. Forget about them." Teachers even would tell, "We're just waiting for them to just drop out." We couldn't envision us doing that. How could you leave a life like that, a life that still had so many opportunities of changing?

So we ended up having some of those programs that I've spoken about, going out to Camp Hess Kramer, getting not the A students, but the F students, the D students, the C student, and try to see how we could motivate them over a weekend. That was done through the Human Relations Commission, because at that time there was a rabbi who had this camp and who did provide it and made it available to us on weekends, not only the Mexican Americans, but also African Americans and blacks, as they were then called. So it was a beautiful time because we were forming partnerships and collaborations with others, other than Mexican Americans. It was a time of the Civil Rights Movement. It was a time when we recognized that all humans had a right, a right, to a better life and that we didn't give up on children, that children were our most valuable resources, and that a teenage was very important. We don't drop him. We even coined a it was not a dropout, it was a push-out. Because, in effect, the system didn't want to struggle with a child that they didn't understand, that they didn't have a curriculum to deal with his needs, and they just pushed him aside because he wasn't in the mold, our mold, this only mold, a monolingual mold. So that was the big change, the contribution that this committee made for those changes. I cannot tell you how much we appreciate the role that Marcos de Leon played in educating us, who we knew what was needed but we didn't know how or better how to translate it so that the system would understand it, our principles and our value for our children, that they did have advocates, that they did have people who cared about their future, that started the beginning of the change. That still is going on, ongoing.

There's no doubt that the bilingual/bicultural educational programs have never had a friendly environment, that there's always been criticism since the first day that we really haven't supported it fully. So the system still is struggling to understand the bilingual/bicultural child, but it has made great steps forward, contrary to what it was in the mid sixties and late sixties. There's so many people, so many are gone. Audrey Kaslow has now left us. Marcos de Leon has left us. So they made great imprints in our community.

ESPINO:

I'm sorry to interrupt, but do you think that when you were learning about the term "biculturalism/bilingualism," did you learn anything about yourself? Did it impact you as a community organizer or as an individual who had that kind of experience in school?

00:21:2200:23:2400:25:39

TOVAR:

You know what? It focused on why there's certain things that happen to me. It focused on me why I had become a quiet child, because I was afraid when I was in elementary to speak up, because I went to school only speaking Spanish. So I could identify with all those other children who went into the public school system only learning Spanish, and yet I was born in this country, right? I learned that if I spoke that I would be punished, so I would be a quiet child, even though that was not really my personality. So in a way without me knowing, I was denying myself. I was uncomfortable, and yet I wanted to learn, so there was this emotional contradiction in me, speak, don't speak, don't say too much. Yet they were grading you if you spoke, if you contributed. Well, how could I contribute if I was still learning the language? Yet I knew that if I spoke it in my way, the way that I could, I would be penalized, so, you know what, the struggle, the struggle that was occurring.

I knew I was looked at differently but if it wasn't for the pride that my parents brought with me as to who I was with my history, my Mexican culture, the language, I probably would have done what many others kids do, and that is just drop out, because it was painful. You were not fully accepted. You knew you were different. There wasn't anything to relate to. In a way, you sort of had to play the game of the system that really wasn't fully you. So I understood many things I had to struggle with. The only thing was my hunger for education. So I did study, I did do the things, but still they were denying me part of me. I accepted when I got home, I felt good when I was home because that was okay. I was all right. It was okay if I was starting to learn English. It was okay if I didn't completely pronounce all the English words correctly. So that's when I was me. So I had to be someone else when I entered the public school system, and I think a lot of kids went through the same thing that I went. Somehow or the other, my parents, I think, were the key factor that kept me going, and in some situations with other kids there might not have been the same kind of knowledge about their history. They were part of that generation that had decided, "Well, I'm going to be punished. Because I was punished at school because I was different, maybe I'm going to teach my child not to speak Spanish or not to take burritos to school," because even that was something to be shameful. There were the children like me who brought burritos for our lunch, and we ate separately because we were made fun of, versus those that brought sandwiches with white bread. (Laughs) White bread was a popular bread if you brought that. That was okay. You were all right if you brought white bread.

So all those things make children regress, get into themselves, and some of them didn't succeed. It wasn't because they were mentally retarded, because that's what many, many children who were so-called like me. For some reason or other, I got away from it, but my brother did not. He was put in a mental retarded, and yet my brother graduated from CSUN with high grades and a medal because of his high grade average. So we took out so many lives. We deprived so many lives being them. We deprived our country those talents, and we labeled them mentally retarded. Think about that. We labeled it. Yet now there's this program called bilingual education for children who are monolingual Spanish speakers, and I'm sort of concerned about that program, because in a way you isolate that child. And, yes, you're trying to bring them to become English speakers, but at the same time are we really giving the subject matter teaching, too, so that they can be at equal level with the other children who are bilingual or monolingual English speakers? It is a label. Some of them look at it. I know, because in my family we have various educators, and the attitude sometimes is that they are different, that maybe there is a little less knowledgeable or less capable of performing. So we have to be on the vanguard, not only we as activists, as educators who understand the bilingual/bicultural child, because programs may start off with good intentions, but the system still doesn't understand fully, fully the bilingual/bicultural child, in my judgment, and what I see and the things that I hear, comments. Sometimes it's by good-intentioned people, so that means that even the universities have to be better in training their teachers to understand this diversity.

In those days, I mean, we weren't as diversified as we are today, and we were not only like diversified in terms of Latino, because now we won't use even the word "Latino." That reflects that there's been this demographic change in increase. But then we have Asians and we have people from the Middle East, we have people from all over the country. So the system has a challenge ahead of it. How do you respect that individual? How do you respect that child and what he brings to the school? How can you appreciate what he's bringing or she's bringing and add it on to the rest of the agenda for that child for the curriculum? How do we integrate that into the school curriculum? So we have a lot of challenges yet. The more that we increase in population, the Latino community, the Mexican American community, the more the system has to understand that child, because they are now in many cities and many towns and in the state going to become and have become the dominant population. So how do we serve that population? Because we want to create productive citizens. We want to create contributing members of our society. If we don't change the system, we ourselves are losing, whether we are bilingual or not bilingual. It's to the benefit of the system and to the nonminority community to ensure that that individual becomes self-sufficient. It is going to hit his pocket and it's going to hit when he becomes a retired person, because we want them to be productive. We want them to have jobs. We want them to contribute to the Social Security system. If we don't understand that, I think, by our biases against them, then that other group is also losing.

00:27:40

ESPINO:

Do you remember some of the arguments against bilingualism/bicultural education?

00:29:3600:32:07

TOVAR:

Oh, well, the ones that were used was that this is America, and America you all should be English speakers, you should all be the same, so you forget what you brought with you. I'm not exaggerating. "Mexico's over there. You're here. You now live here, you're an American citizen," and that was it. It was a strong feeling. It was a strong feeling, and some of it was because of their own biases against Mexican Americans and Latinos, and some were just people who didn't know. They thought that was it and that had been taught and it gave opportunity to everyone. Look at all these other immigrants. Look at the Italians. Look at the X, Y, Z others, the Irish, they integrated. But there's a different thing. Those are Europeans. Those are white. The Latino is a Mestizo. Latino is part of this continent, which is very hard for them to understand. We did not cross 3,000 miles of ocean to get here. We could very easily communicate back and forth. That's a different psychology. That's a different political, social, economic thought and impression. That was not understood. We were made to be treated like all other immigrants. Well, yes, and even though we're sometimes immigrants, sometimes are we really immigrants? We were here. Our history, not my bias, but our history was that we have been here in the Southwest even before any white men came into this country. Then afterwards we still were part of the Southwest, and we are now part of the Southwest, not only the Southwest but we're moving everywhere. We're in New York, we're in Kansas, we're in Michigan, etc. I know, because I have relatives

over there.

So that was very hard, and that's why there was resistance. There was resistance. You're negating your own American (unclear) American. But to be an American is to be all of those things. So those very serious, serious battles. There are still some people, I'm sure you've heard them, that "This is America, and if you don't want to play the games that is so dominant here, you go back to Mexico." Right now there's people that are even shooting people who look different who are Mexican, and, as you know, I believe it's the Los Angeles Police Department the last week announced that hate crime has decreased, but hate crime against Mexicans□and they use the word "Mexican"□has increased. So we still have that battle in front of us. We still have to be aware that we not fully accepted, but the thing about it is that it's not a matter of acceptance. It's a matter that we're here, we're part of the fiber, which is so difficult for them to understand. When you're part of the fiber, how can you take a fiber out of that cloth since we're integrated into it. They may not like it, but that's the truth of it. The other thing is that you're not going to go away. There's also this other concept that another country, when you're border countries, that's a marginal area where it integrates. Like if you go to Texas, where I was very much impressed, in Texas when we're on our way to see our cousins in San Antonio, in El Paso, everybody was bilingual. Anglos spoke Spanish just like□you know, and English. There was a mixture there because in any country, whether it's in France with whatever other country borders it, there's that area where the two cultures politically and culturally and economically come together. We yet are fighting that. Whether we're doing it conscientiously or not, that's we're not accepting the realities that have happened all throughout the world when you have border countries that's there.

I think part of it□again, I hate to go back to the educational system, but it doesn't fully understand that and that responsibility has to fall not only on Board of Education, it has to fall on the schools themselves, but also higher education that's training those teachers. It's a great challenge. It's not an easy one, apparently, because we've been struggling with it for a long time. The resistance is there. There's people who think that to be an American is one who speaks the language, English, and you know the movement on English Only. That's part of that resistance. That movement is part of that resistance. You know people that are Minutemen who right now have the rifles and are trying to get rid of us. It's so tragic, because they don't even know their own history that their great-great-great-great, how many greats behind them, got on a boat and crossed over here, and we said, "(Spanish phrase)." We greeted them. There's a joke that says, "Oh, there goes the neighborhood." I don't know if you heard that one. (Laughs) But seriously speaking, we have a challenge ahead, but I got to give a lot of credit to that Mexican American Education Committee that started the struggle to make sure□I want another person that I really feel□Connie. Connie was a person whose husband was an attorney, and she was the secretary to him. Connie also was the woman in the□ (Interruption)

00:34:2200:36:40

TOVAR:

There was another lady that I got to acknowledge, because they were role models for me, Connie Muñoz. There was also women there that□I was a young college student at that time, and I wanted to go into education. So other than my mother, who I was so proud of and who always taught me to be who I was and not to be ashamed of me, and to (Spanish phrase), she would always say, they were all models for me.

Francisca Flores sometimes would come to the meetings, because we did try to get at least on other people who had been active at that time to know what we were trying to do, and the issue of education was very prominent. Connie and Gerry and us, Audrey, were women that I had never encountered yet. So they were knowledgeable. They were articulate. They didn't feel threatened by anyone, not even by our little machitos that were in the committee. They spoke and they brought ideas. I was so impressed with them, and I said, "My god, I want to be as knowledgeable and as articulate as they are, and not to have fear of going before the board," because this was a new experience for us. For us as Chicanas, this was a new experience, and we had not utilized that talent. How tragic. They impacted me whether they know it or not. Gerry is still active and Connie has become an attorney. She was then a secretary to her husband, but now she's an attorney. It was a great learning. I pay a lot of tribute to what this committee did, the Camp Hess Kramer, where we took our kids, those kids from the high school. This is where the schools all then started working with us, and we went to the low two schools that had kids with dropout rates and who were just barely making it. That weekend, through this committee, changed their lives. I often would think, that weekend, did we change that young man or that young woman's life? Did we really do it? Then years pass and we happen to have encountered some of those young people who are now in colleges and who are on the road to get their B.A., and you know that this committee had made an impact. That's where I tell people never to lose faith on a young man or a young woman who you think is not worthy of spending my time.

Think about it, a weekend, just because we showed we cared, just because we had young successful men and women who were Mexican Americans and came and told them, "Look, I struggled too. I struggled, too, but I made it. I was persistent." Even though I didn't know Spanish when I first started school, I learned it and I'm now making it. But I had to break those books and I had to open them, and I had to spend hours. Those kids were inspired, and these were Ds and Fs and C students that we took, and they changed their lives.

ESPINO:

Was it all volunteer time?

00:38:2900:40:33

TOVAR:

It was all volunteer time, all volunteer. We were called youth advisors. Well, the youth advisors got paid, I think $25. It was just a symbolic, but the people who came and participated in the conference, the role models, the dentists, the nurses, the doctors, the lawyers, that we had, they were all volunteer, all volunteer. This is the other thing I say to our community: let's participate in programs that will benefit our kids. Give a little bit of your time, especially now with the temptation of TV that comes in and all the computers. Even if you give me one hour, if a local area gave one hour a week for kids, we would make dramatic changes. Whether it's going to the school and talking to that principal and saying, "I want a better program for my kids," or, "Why don't my kids don't have enough books?" or, "Why is not computers in our system?" Our kids are now, it's a high-tech world. Why not? If we just hold them accountable, spend that one hour, that's one way.

Or you might join and be a volunteer parent in the schools, or you may be a volunteer even in baseball, because some games will not let you play unless you do your homework. Or promote it. Read in the public libraries in our barrios where we need readers to read to the children. There's so many, many, many□or develop an organization that focus on education. Go to the Board of Education, observe how decisions are made over the future of your child. There's so many, many ways that you can make the system know that you are holding them accountable, that you want a better□like other parents who are rich, that's what they do. We have to do the same thing. We do have an obligation, and we do have a challenge before us, and we are responsible. That's the other thing, we are responsible for our children's future. But we want to be good partners with the Board of Education, with the local schools, to make that child succeed, because it takes all of us, but it starts in the family. It starts in the family. Make sure your child does their homework, and if he's not bringing it, why isn't he bringing it? If it's him, well, you better bring it, and I'm going to call the teacher. If it's a school, why isn't he having homework, and what kind of homework is he having? So especially right now for the future□we all know this□it's going to be focused on science and math, and if that child is not friendly or alienated or that those subjects are made to be uncomfortable for them, they are not going to succeed in the world, in the world. That means they're not going to have a job because they don't know those skills, so basic to everything. So our challenge is great, and we have a lot of work to do, but if we do it all together, it's going to be much easier.

ESPINO:

What kind of response did you get from the Mexican American community from the parents? Were they interested in bilingualism?

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TOVAR:

There was a mixture, and part of it was because of the system. I had mothers who were against bilingual education, and I was shocked, because I thought, oh, my god, how could anybody be against it? But you know what? They were the victims, which they didn't know, of the past educational system. They said, "I don't want my child to suffer like I did, so I don't want them to learn Spanish. I want them to learn English, because then they'll succeed and they'll be accepted." They'll be accepted, but they have to transform completely themselves in order to be accepted. They feel very strongly about it, and so that's still even now exists because the pain was so great for them as young children. Then you have the parents who do support it, understand it, but that element that is (unclear) sometimes is used by the system to say, "Hey, Mrs. Hernandez does not believe in bilingual education, so we have to take that into consideration," and that sort of thing. That's a result of discrimination. That's a result of ignorance. That's a result of us growing as children, not feeling good about who we were. That was a loss. I think we lost a lot of talent, because I remember my classroom, and I remember some kids who were so smart, and yet there was not that support to them. I know one of them ended up being overdosed and found in a gas station, and he was the smartest. But somehow the system missed him, failed him. There were other ones that were very smart, and some other, because what would happen to him, he would be channeled into homemaking. No matter how bright that young woman was, homemaking. If it was a young boy, he channeled immediately to woodshop. That's the only options we had.

After all, you know, you're a Mexican. That's what they were telling you. They might have said it because some of them were daring enough to say it, and some didn't, but that's what their thoughts are. "Well, that's what she's going to end up being. After all, they get pregnant and they have kids, and they might as well know how to run a household." The boy, what is it? Now even shop is where they're going to get a job doing shop work. But we need to update. That's the other challenge we have now. We have to update the educational skills of our kids to meet the 2011 generation. We haven't even addressed the issue of trade schools that there are. Why are some of them still teaching them trades that there's no need for? We should be teaching more high-tech system jobs that they can get them a job. I finally got to the conclusion or the acceptance, maybe that's a better word, that not all kids can be successful going through college, that there are other ways. A carpenter□not a carpenter. A plumber, he earns a very good living. There will always be a need for plumbing. An electrician, we'll need an electrician. Those are high-paid jobs. Even a truck drivers, and there are schools for truck drivers, and they earn very good money. But we should look at where is this high technology going and how the school system must meet the challenge of that technology and integrate it into their curriculum. Again, I want to emphasize the importance of math and science, math and science. I know in the late sixties and seventies when we started getting La Raza into the colleges, we emphasized be a teacher, be a teacher.

There's a shortage of bilingual teachers. Make sure you get them (unclear).

But you know what? We didn't encourage them to go into engineering. We didn't include them to go into the high tech at that time, which would make you now to be better prepared for the Computer Age informational generation. So now we've got to say, yes, teachers are important, and we still need them, but let's look at where the sciences are going. Where can you fit our children into those fields, so that they are strong in math and science so that they can take it on? There's many skills, good-paying jobs that will come in that generation. That's where we want to push our young kids. So that's important.

ESPINO:

How did you convince the Board of Education?

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TOVAR:

One of the things we did besides putting a position paper so that they knew (unclear), we spent time thinking through how we wanted to do that. We went and testified before the Board of Education. Not only did we testify before the Education and let our position be known, but we met individually with board members and reinforced that and tried to get their vote on our position paper and then got them to make that part of their policy. So we used to fill the, I remember, Board of Education auditorium. It was a beautiful time. Of all forms of education, from the housewife to the janitor, to people with M.A.'s and B.A.'s, of the few that we had at that time, we would fill the whole auditorium. So they understood exactly that we wanted this for our kids, that we really were advocates for them, that we were the protectors of their future.

They got the message. Now, that doesn't mean it was easy. It doesn't mean that because we spoke immediately that there were changes. It didn't mean that because we met with board members that they immediately agreed to, because it was new. It was new for them to see so many of us as just seeing us as Mexicans there. Secondly, that we did have a well-thought-through position. Secondly, this is the first time many of them were meeting with Mexicans. Here they were determining the future of our children's life, and they had not met with us. I mean, think about that. We should be visible. We should be voicing our concerns over our children. We didn't have any board members who were Latinos. Remember, that was all whites. There were no African American, there were no Asians, let alone Latinos or Mexican Americans at that time. So we were talking to people who didn't yet experience our lives, who didn't understand who we were because they hadn't lived it. So we had to educate them. Then after we educated them, we had to push the position of what it would mean to make those changes. There were eventually those that became our strongest supporters and advocated for us. There were those that never completely, if not completely, didn't understand where we were coming from. But it was a challenging area. It was an exciting area because you were all united in large numbers. Now I see sometimes on TV the Board of Education meetings, and I look and they show the audience, and one or two little parents there. I said, "Oh, my goodness. We used to fill that auditorium." The challenges are still there.

As I said, it's so tragic to find out that the LAPD has indicated that hate crimes against Mexicans have increased, and we don't really talk about it. We talk about other groups. The minute someone says on offensive word about another of a potentially group, they fire him. Or it's on TV, and, oh, my god. It's rightly so. I'm not saying that that's right, it's right that they're not being punished. But you never hear when it's a Mexican or a Latino. You never, never (unclear), and the media has a responsibility to also reflect that, because haven't you heard how we are portrayed? If there's a crime, some even criminals use Mexican American or Latino to put the fault. Well, I saw a Latino with a child, and I think that was the perpetrator. Then you find out that the person who was pointing the figure was the actual one that did the crime. But the media never comes back and corrects that. That's (unclear). So we have to also integrate the media, educate the media about who we are. Who talks about the horrible crimes that are being committed in the Southwest because of the hatred toward them where children are killed? I was shocked when finding a Spanish-speaking station, talked about, because they thought they were immigrants. They were illegal, so-called illegal. I was just listening yesterday, as a matter of fact, a very progressive radio station, and the issue was should we use the word "illegal," "illegal immigrants," and what that produces, the psychic that created among the dominant group. I didn't hear anybody□it was open so that you could phone. I was in the car driving, so I couldn't call in and give my opinion, but this was a progressive station, and they didn't understand the issue. They weren't even aware of this report by the police department. Yet on other subjects they are very up to date, even the Middle East and what's happening in Egypt and what's happening in Greece, and yet here we don't understand the Mexican American, the Latino.

His answer for this commentator, well, you know, sort of minimizing that by saying, well, here we are in Los Angeles, one of the most diverse, and that was it. I said, there was no comment. There was no experts who really were coming to talk about the implications of it. It's sad, because we are the dominant group, and we're going to interact and we're not going to go away. Because let's say they take the one million that exist, the so-called undocumented. There's a child that was born here, and there's people like me, who my parents had papers, and who didn't go through this horrible experience, because it was a different era where you could get your papers in about two years, versus now ten years. Some people are the list for ten years. Can you just imagine what they go through? It's really very tragic. We haven't addressed the lives of those families who are separated. So that means we have to do a lot of education and a lot of advocacy and not be afraid of it, because even some of our□well, politicians. The reason it hasn't been resolved is politicians are just not courageous enough□and I'm being very polite□courageous enough to address the issue of immigration.

00:52:24

ESPINO:

Do you think that it took a great amount of courage for the Board of Education to accept your position on bilingualism and biculturalism?

TOVAR:

Do I think that□

ESPINO:

Do you think it took courage for them to agree with you?

00:54:34

TOVAR:

I think, at that time, Virginia, the thing that was interesting is that it was a different political time. The Civil Rights Movement had just won. We had collaboration from the Jewish community, churches other than including the Catholic Church, Presbyterian. I mean, the churches had gotten together to deal with discrimination. That element made it a little bit easier, because we were powerful members of Los Angeles, the power structure that did go along with the Civil Rights Movement. But they still had that other element that was not comfortable with it. But it was a little bit more easier, I think, in my opinion, than today, ironically, to take some concept that might be very controversial for the schools. Before that, you didn't ask a child or the parents whether they were here legally or illegally. Now you have to because of, well, if they find out that you are housing undocumented people, oh, my goodness, you'll lose your license, or if you're a politician you'll be in front of the TV and they're questioning, "Why did you have an illegal?" It's a very different climate. There's no doubt that it was hard. It wasn't easy at those times, and there might have been Minutemen. But now our community knows about the Minutemen. The Minutemen and the Ku Klux Klan had been squashed during the Civil Rights Movement. So there was that fear yet, but it wasn't as dramatic as it is now. Now if someone carries, as I told you, hey, those politicians better not have any illegals, so-called illegals, because their political future is dependent on it. So they're not going to be so courageous as really some of those board members that did.

At that time, they were all whites in that era. Julian Nava came much later to become the first Latino or Mexican American on the Board of Education. Just like now, what is it? We have three. The only, I think, just retired, (unclear).

ESPINO:

Oh, right. That was Sanchez. Sanchez and a UTLA member

TOVAR:

Yes. We have a representative from the Valley, (unclear) Martinez (phonetic) is our representative this year, and we have the chair, Maria. Think about it, the names (unclear) but it's a different one. But they also have challenges ahead. It's not going to be easy.

ESPINO:

I think that what I understood just from my own experience as a teacher is that it's been difficult to educate the working class, bilingualism or no bilingualism, because I think even in areas where there's no bilingual□bilingualism isn't the issue□there's still a lot of kids not graduating. So it's kind of figuring out how do you educate kids of the working poor.

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TOVAR:

I think I've been blessed, and I feel honored that most of my work has been working with the poor. I think we have sometimes just focused on the educational system, but I think we've neglected the role of the parent. I don't think we've given the parents the tools that they need so that they can understand their role. They know traditionally (Spanish phrase), make sure that they're fed, make sure that they're healthy, and they love education. But how do you translate that to activity, to plan somehow they will work to advocate for the children? Some parents think, well, I'll go□let's say the ones that understand a little bit better, they'll go to the school and they'll support, even volunteer. But is that enough?

I think what we need to do, and partly I saw it in Head Start, because I was in Head Start for ten years, eleven years. What we did was it mandated, and it was a requirement, that you work with the parents and you train them. Even though there were a lot of weaknesses that I saw in how they envisioned□and this is part of the Civil Rights Movement concept□that you train the parents. But there's always been also hostility to having parents' involvement. They feel threatened by parents, and they've had, as you know, some parents' groups in the schools. I think because they haven't trained them enough, it has become sometimes just a battle or little (unclear) among the parents and all that kind of stuff. We haven't seriously taken them into consideration how do I train the parents. How do they know about parenting? How do they know accountability? How do they understand what the child needs to do? Much better than we've done. I'm not saying that it hasn't been done, but how do we improve on it? Because apparently it's not having that effect. So it means we have to review, and I hope the system would not feel defensive about it because many times it defends it instead of saying, okay, let's look at how we can change it. Let's see how we can get the parent involved. I saw dramatic changing in our parents, and, mind you, these were low-income parents. These were parents who themselves may not have as much□well, let's see. When I left, because we had to every year give a prototype of a parent, most of my parents had maybe, maybe a sixth-grade education, maybe a sixth-grade education. Mind you, that's recently.

We were pushing literacy. So how do you teach parents who don't know how to read and write to read to their children? Well, we found a way, and the parents did take the time, like we told them, and they did read to their children. Now, how did they read? We had pictures, picture books. And what happened was very interesting because not only did the parents all of a sudden take an interest in them learning, they themselves learning how to read and write, but they were bonding with their child. The whole thing was that they spent fifteen minutes every night reading to their children. That was the minimum we were asking. We had a way of holding them accountable to that reading, and they did it. They did it. We started with parents who were literate, and we worked with parents who were illiterate, and they did. What was so touching was that parent that didn't know how to read or write and his embarrassment and the emotion that came with him and her not knowing how to read and write, and then all of a sudden her love for her child was so great that they did eventually started wanting to go to classes and they did go to classes for to learn how to read and write. But they read to their children through pictures, and we trained them how to read to their children by pictures, and how to use the words for the child to develop that words for□you know. Then their own interest in becoming better parents, better educated, and going and taking them to the library and having someone read for them and selecting books. I mean, we taught them how to do it. We should look at it and see if we can do it (unclear) and we can improve on it, because I still saw things that we could improve on how the directors were from Head Start to do it. But it was a beginning, so let's say we work with the parents on learning how to be parents, which is a little bit different, but it impacts the child emotionally. Instead of arguing in front of your children, how do you deal with children, how do you treating a child who has some kind of an emotional problem, that helped, because that parent became a collaborator in working with their child in the school.

Instead of the child, oh, your child is a troublemaker□and I'm exaggerating there a little bit. The parent started to learn how to work with a child instead of (unclear), because I've seen that. I used to see this. My work, as I told you, has been working with low-income families, but what I also like to do is, now that I'm a little bit removed now from what my life was then as low income, so I go to the stores where my clients go to and to see what they go through, and that was part of that program NAPP that taught me to do that. I go and I see what they can buy, what they can't, and I see the child asking for something. "(Spanish phrase)." That's very touching to me. But then I also see how some parents treat their children. "(Spanish phrase)." Well, in parenting classes we show them you do not ever tell a child, "(Spanish phrase)," or you don't use negative things. You give them words that will be encouraging that develops their self-confidence. Now, why is that important? Because now we're working eventually with the school system so that that child is much more self-secure about themselves, has a better identity about themselves, and can succeed. So it's a (unclear). It's not easy. I'm not telling educators that it's easy. But for those that love working and seeing the change of a child, that you're actually creating a better human being, a more better prepared person to deal with the challenges that are coming in the future generation, I think that's a wonderful contribution that you've made in your life to humanity.

So I think we need to work with the parents. I need to have them look at the parents as partners and to teach them to, educate them, and maybe the parents also have good ideas. One of the things I learned about Head Start, never to be so arrogant to think you have all the answers because you have a higher education. I learned so much from those parents because they had gone to the college of life, and they have skills that we can utilize. So I will always listen, because I'm always learning from them.

ESPINO:

Was there a parent component in the early bilingual proposals that you were□

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TOVAR:

We indicated that parents should be coming into the schools. We had not yet had a complete curriculum, but already we were suggesting that parents played a very important role. We were not yet with the issue of parenting, which is also a new concept, really. We were not necessarily, but we knew that they had to be informed, that they had to be told what their child needed, how they could help coming to school, Open House, that Open House should be bilingual, because it was always English-only, and so that they would feel welcome into the school system. Because many parents expressed at that time how they felt very uncomfortable going to school. There was nobody there that spoke the language. They had to bring an interpreter to talk to the teacher, to talk to the principal. So we made recommendations regarding that, that it would be bilingual staffing, because, remember, there were hardly any bilingual teachers or minority teachers. So then we did push more bilingual teachers. That's where we started to say, hey, there's a shortage of bilingual. Well, there isn't any bilingual teachers. So we also impacted the higher education system.

By also pushing the Board of Education, they, in turn, pressured the colleges to develop more bilingualism. There were classes, and I participated in being invited by the university to various workshops in which we helped the young student teacher understand better the bilingual child, the bicultural child, and encouraged teachers learning how to speak Spanish and how to understand it. So that started a wave of changes that now we know much more teachers are bilingual themselves, even though they may not be bicultural. The impact, you might be□for example, someone born in this country of Mexican parents, let's say, or Latino parents, and they are taught to be bilingual but not bilingual, that doesn't necessarily they understand the child that they're working with. Marcos de Leon made us think so clearly that bilingualism, knowing the language, languages have a view of things, expressed views, expressed concepts. That language may be different than the English language who may not have that word or that concept. I don't know too much about this, but I understand that the Eskimos have various words for snow in terms of we say it's snow, now it's ice, or it's falling, or it's just snow. But that they have I forget how many number of ways of identifying with the snow, which means they're looking at things differently versus me, who doesn't understand. It's either ice or it's snow. That's it. I don't know, melting snow maybe, if the snow is melting. The snow is melting, or melting snow, that's two words. But for them, I understand there's only one word for that characteristic. I couldn't have known the distinction, and that may make me less sensitive to their vision of that snow world.

He was such a great teacher for us as advocates for the children and the role that it also□and then even more technical, what it did to our brain. Remember, it's only lately that they're talking about brain studies that they had the children, but he already was talking about that, what it does to your brain, that you have connections. He was very technical on this in terms of it. It's been a long time in terms of the cell development and the internetworks and that you had more connectors because you knew more languages, and the more languages you knew the more connections you made. So I was just fascinated. He was such a great teacher. Bless his heart. I'm so sorry that people hardly ever, if ever, they mention him.

ESPINO:

That's true.

01:09:3101:11:33

TOVAR:

But for us, he made that change and he educated us. Phil Montes, the same in terms of the psychology, better counselors. How do we guide these children? The same thing goes with guiding parents and understanding what they should do for their child. My parents loved education, but when I went to college, I didn't know about credits. I didn't know about semesters. I didn't know about matriculation. What in the heck does that word mean? So it was very different, versus a parent who already went to law school or is a doctor or a teacher and who already knows those words and can just easily pass it on to their children when they're breaking bread or whatever. Yet their love was there. Their full support for me to get an education was there.

So we do need to work with the parents, meaningful, not in a superficial way, but in a very, very intensive way. It's not easy, because you're dealing with different dynamics. Is that parent literate? Is he illiterate? Does it feel that we should learn bilingualism or the importance of it? Are they hostile toward bilingualism because of their hurts or their fears of having been treated badly? Because they are low income, many of them□now, I'm not saying all of them, but a vast majority□what are their struggles economically that then impact the family stability and how do they deal with that with anger and everything? So it's very challenging. I accept that. But if you go into

education, you make that choice. You've already married into it, whether you know it or not, and you have to work with it if you really want to be a teacher. I'm really happy when certain teachers leave the system, not in a negative way, but they were true to themselves, that they couldn't handle it, and that's better than a teacher who keeps on becoming a teacher even though they hate the teaching. Then their commitment is not for that child and they cannot accept the challenges which are sometimes very difficult. I've encountered those as someone who has administered programs, but because I believe in it so passionately, I can deal with the challenges. I can deal with those moments when it's so frustrating or so how can I better reach out. That full commitment that you know that once you reach out the right way you can make change. I believe in that. But if you're committed to that, it becomes a problem, not a challenge.

ESPINO:

Can I ask you about the dynamics of the group itself? Because when historians look at the Chicano Movement, they look at how women left because they felt like they were put in stereotypical roles like doing the cooking or being the secretary.

TOVAR:

Or being the secretary only. I went through that.

ESPINO:

Yes. Do you find that that existed in this organization, that women didn't have an equal voice, that only the men could take the leadership roles? It sounds like Marcos de Leon was a unique character himself.

TOVAR:

Yes.

ESPINO:

But the rest of the dynamics, how did that work out?

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TOVAR:

See, Marcos was a teacher, and he taught us equally, right? But Marco also, too, was a man of his time. Not as bad as others. I will tell you that if you really talk to Lilian Aceves, for example, that's another lady that was so involved, we all felt that we were not fully acknowledged. But we were persistent. That was the one thing that made us so different. I know Gerry, for example, was very, very persistent. So was Connie Muñoz and Lilian Aceves. My god, they were women that were not they knew and we felt it, and we discussed it, by the way. We did talk about it among ourselves, that the guys somehow were very machos. The other thing that perhaps sometimes they didn't like was that all of them were advocates for Chicanos, but they were not married to Chicanas. It was the time, a reflection of the time. Because to progress as a man, Latino Americano, was not necessarily to marry within your own. That's why people like Frank Muñoz, who married Connie Muñoz, was a little bit different. But most of them were, and therefore we were looked as different as Chicanas. We did, we did bring up proposals, and they were nice to us, but we were still women, women who were viewed at that time as not necessarily being the front person that you acknowledge what they did. So that did exist. It did exist.

However, I think they held back more than others because they did have degrees. They were educated, but that doesn't mean that because you're an educated man that you don't believe women have another role. One of the women, which I won't mention her name, because I don't want to actually got divorced because of her involvement in the committee, not because of her, but because it was asked

by the husband. So even those women that were married, other than people like Frank Muñoz, who was professional and very progressive that they were, one of them did end up having lost her marriage because of her involvement, directly because of that. It still remains, unfortunately. It still exists, maybe less, we can say. Maybe less, but it still exists even among the□and I'm now talking about those that have degrees. It happens. I know that when I worked in Head Start these ten years that I worked with parents and mostly the parents meetings were in the daytime, so that means we mostly had women. Those women were always hurrying to make food and make sure they had supper for their husband or lunch, because if they didn't, they maybe would not have them participate in the parents' group. So we still have a role, a big, big responsibility, of working with our men to understand the role that a woman can play in respecting her desires, her interests, and being active. Many times I was not surprised that□well, when we would ask them if they would do something, "Well, let me find out if it's okay with my husband." So that's still□and in a way it's funny because you want to be a partner, you want to communicate, but if it's one that limits your involvement or your desire to be involved, then it's a negative. If it's one of helping, wanting to help the family, and knowing that she can play a role and that she's an individual with talents, just like I encountered with my nephew and my niece. Oh, the husband is so supportive of her. "Oh, yeah, sure, I'll do this so that you can do that." That's how we hopefully will want to go more and more in that direction. They both are college-educated.

But I also see it sometimes in those that have college degrees that still that's not your traditional role. I was surprised one day, again, when someone who I respect, male educated person, told me that why I didn't I speak to□in a particular university, he said, "Why don't you talk better to the women professors? Because they may understand you better." Why would I just go to women to talk about something that's universal? I can speak to a man as well as a woman. This just happened within the last month or so. So we have a lot of work to do. We have a lot of work to do, but it's challenging. My mother always said, "Irene, make sure that when you leave this world, you've left it a little bit better than the day you came in." I say, "Well, Mom, I hope I can stay here quite a while." But you see, we have a lot of challenges. They are multi. But I will always say that this Educational Committee was so key in my life, in educating me, in training me, in respecting our own talent within our community, and that there are many Latino Mexican Americans who want to make a difference and that we need to advocate for it, not just to accept it or accept data or anything, but be active. Active means different things in different ways, and sometimes we only think of being an activist is only picketing. That's okay. I did it, and right now, unfortunately, I can't do it, but I would do it if it's called for.

But I've also learned other strategies, and we need to learn how the systems work, whether it's education or whatever it is, and learn its rules and regulations, and if they're not right, be involved and help change them. Because the system doesn't voluntarily change it. The system doesn't empower you automatically. It started somewhere where someone's pushing the system to make those changes, and you portray it as a way of how the system can survive by your participation, that it's better off by you participating, which is true. But in it you have to be involved and you have to be an advocate all the time. I think that's the message if only we could get through our people that have been successful in getting an education, because they can better understand how to move the system. The system will listen to you more if you have an education, if you have a master's degree, if you have a Ph.D. versus, unfortunately, being a mother, yet a mother knows so much. You see, that's part of the problem of the educational system. We assume that to be poor, it means that you don't have the mental ability to be part of the partners in making changes. I've learned so much when I've involved my parent partners, I've been able to succeed in making changes when I was in Head Start. But if I didn't have my parents there with me and understanding why I was pushing something or how could we make it better, what did they think about it, then it was more difficult making changes.

So that's why I really feel so strongly that we've got to use it now. It's become more difficult, and that committee taught me so much every Monday morning, every evening. Actually. that we went. I used to go. I was a Valley so-called liaison, because I was a so-called (unclear).

ESPINO:

Right. You've come a long□ (End of November 23, 2011 interview)

SESSION FOUR (December 7, 2011)

00:00:11

ESPINO:

This is Virginia Espino, and today's December 7, 2011. I'm interviewing Irene Tovar at her home in Mission Hills, California.

So today we're going to start with an organization that you were a cofounder of, or one of the founding members, back in 1960, and that's the Latin American Civic Association. Can you talk to me about its importance and how it started?

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TOVAR:

Yes. I'll probably refer to it as LACA, an abbreviation for that, so that you know what I'm referring to. Well, I was a young college student in the sixties, and I wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to be a history teacher. Because of my parents, I so identified who I was, my ethnic background, my history, and so I was very proud of that. They taught me to be proud of that. I also was made very much aware by my parents, especially my father, of the socioeconomic condition of our community. They believed that the ser humano was such a valuable thing in this universe above everything else and that we had a responsibility in how little or how big we could do to change the condition of the ser humano. I guess it's religious, it's ethnic, that concept in itself, and it's historical. So as a young woman wanting to be a history teacher and also being very self-conscious of our socioeconomic condition here in the Valley, I heard the beginnings of people trying to get together to see□we would form an organization that would address the issues that we confronted: the dropout rate, discrimination, because that was prior to the Civil Rights Movement.

So a group of us started getting together, and actually I was the youngest one, because I was still sort of in my senior year, toward my senior year. We got together and we formed an organization that we called the Latin American Civic Association. Now, the question may be why use the word Latin American Civic Association? Well, this was our first issue that in a positive way divided us, and I say that because we all respected each other, even though we had different opinions. At that time, the word that was most controversial was "Mexican American," and the one more acceptable was "Latin American." So I was outvoted. I argued for the issue of calling ourselves the Mexican American Civic Association, but some members felt that, well, we've also got to see if we can work with the Anglo community so they know that we're trying to do certain things, and try and see if their resources, like the schools, that we were going to work. I said, "No, we should let them learn that are Mexican Americans, and we are proud of who we are, and we are being proactive in trying to work with the issues of our community." But I got outvoted, but I remained in it. But that's the reason why it ended up being Latin American, because at that time the word "Mexican American" was more equivalent when we started talking about the word "Chicano." It was almost about the same kind of temperament that was existing in our community. But the Latin American Civic Association, we filed in as a 501(c)3, an official nonprofit organization. It attracted a lot of people who were educators, and some of the people that were prime founders of it was people like Dr. Miguel Montes, who was the only Mexican American dentist in the whole San Fernando Valley; and one of the prominent women, a mature woman, was Antonio Tejada, who was a real estate lady, and she was one of those members that were very active. The other members that originally started sort of dropped off, but those were the key prime movers.

Later on, we had people like Ed Moreno (phonetic) from Canoga Park. We ended up having people that eventually□one of the founders is a very well-known historian, Rudy Acuña. At that time he was a teacher at Reseda High School, I believe, and he became very much involved in the organization. We had subcommittees under that, and under that, again, the Education Committee was one of the key movers and most active committee. We had at that time, talking about women issues, Latina, we had a Women's Auxiliary, and I didn't feel comfortable being member of Women's Auxiliary because it was like, "This is your work, lady." There were people who were friendly. They were not horrible people. But the men thought that we should have a Women's Auxiliary. Now, what did the Women's Auxiliary do? Bake sales, (unclear) sales. We were fundraisers. Being that I was a woman, a young woman, I did help, but, I don't know, it didn't seem right that we should be separated and have our little functions over here and yet we were the backbone of the organization as far as organizing events, organizing fundraisers and so forth. But it did have that Women's Auxiliary. It no longer exists, but it had a Women's Auxiliary. But the Education Committee was the one that at that time raised money on its own to teach children twenty-five words in English. We were concerned about the dropout rate, and we didn't know how to deal with it. We went to the public schools, and the public schools let us know that Mexicans don't care about the education of their children. We were very outraged, and we decided that we were going to prove them wrong.

But we couldn't tackle the whole issue since we were not part of the system, but we said, "How about if we start with the children? What if we can teach them English?" Because, apparently, that was a major problem, the school system was saying. We had heard in Texas there was a program that was started, I believe by LULAC, that taught Mexican American, monolingual, Spanish-speaking children twenty-five words in English so that when they entered elementary school they at least knew some very basic English. So we decided that we would do that, and we raised the money to pay for one teacher to come twice a week and teach children, well, preschool, activities that are related to preschool-aged children, with the intent of them learning English so that they could then transition to elementary school and not go through the experience that many of us, like myself, who□I was a monolingual Spanish speaker. So I didn't know a single word in English when I entered elementary, and it's a very, very hostile environmental for that child, and especially in that times when the teachers were not sensitive or aware of the importance of being bilingual and a bicultural child, or let alone a monolingual Spanish-speaking child. In that era, children who were monolingual Spanish speakers would be put in mentally retarded classes, and that was the official name of those classes. Why? Because they didn't speak English, and it had nothing to do with their ability. It had to do with that they didn't know how to speak English.

So all of those, from our point of view, as LACA, we thought it was a criminal thing that was happening to our children. So we started that, and it was at Las Palmas Park, which is the park here in the city of San Fernando. We, as volunteers, members of LACA, went door to door in the barrio, and we spoke to the parents and we tried to let them know that we were going to offer this program. It was going to be free of charge and that their children would be able to learn twenty-five words in English and that they would be taught games and so to ease them into elementary school and there would be some physical activity. It was very interesting in talking about the culture, which in some cases still exists. We would sometimes have to go twice to one house where we would talk. If we found the lady of the house, she would say, "I think that's a good idea, but I got to have permission from my husband. Why don't you come back when he's here?" So we would have to come back again when the husband was back, had come back from work, and we would then sit with the father and mother, now together, would explain. Fortunately, the majority of the fathers never said no. As a matter, quite the opposite, they did say. But there is that cultural thing that the woman cannot make that decision by herself unless the husband said it was okay. So that was a learning thing for many, and for many of us we expected that to have happened, because that was the times. Those were the times. You know, very honestly, in some situations that still is, especially in the more limited educated mothers, and that's the relation that still exists. But it was very interesting because we had to prove to the system that parents, Mexican American parents, did care about the education of the children, and, yes, they would have their children go to preschool. It was sort of a challenge, because there was a lot of

educators who thought we would not be able to be successful.

So I was one of those volunteers who was going to register the parents that morning, and I had faith in my community, but I was still a little bit apprehensive. So I got there about seven o'clock in the morning, somewhere around there, and I was shocked. They were there before me, and it went all around the block, and they came with their little children. I was so happy, I was so elated, I said, "Thank you, thank you, community. You've shown what we've believed in." From then on we had a waiting list between 1961 to 1965, when we applied for Head Start, and we were able to pay our own teacher. We raised the money. Talk about the Women's Auxiliary, their cake sales, their enchilada sales, and all that kind of stuff. Then the men, too, of course, they participated. We raised the money to pay one teacher twice a week to come and teach the children twenty-five words. Then we started to be respected by the school system, and that's when all of a sudden the school started looking toward us and, "What would you recommend?" and more open discussions about the problems they face and how could we help them, make sure we talked to parents and got the parents to the meeting. The parents' meetings were always conducted in English, so a lot of parents didn't go because they didn't understand, and we related simple things like that. Then all of a sudden they started having bilingual or monolingual Spanish speakers. In that era, remember, there were not that many Spanish-speaking teachers or Chicana teachers. So sometimes the parents themselves, one parent would volunteer to be a translator who was a little bit more English speaking.

So we that started that change in the school system, very quiet change, by doing those things, and then all of a sudden parent involvement became more intense in the elementary school, and all of a sudden the membership also started to change. Instead of being all Mexican Americans, all of a sudden we had good-intentioned Anglos who came to the meetings, became members, and who were supportive of the efforts we were making. Then we dealt with the issue of the dropout rate. The dropout rate, we started then dealing with the junior high schools. Now the administrators were listening a little bit more to what we had to say, and we started working then. This is now going forward a little bit, and then I'll come back to it. That's when started working with the junior high and high schools to start submitting names to that committee that I talked to you, the Los Angeles County Education Committee. That's how we started connecting and giving names of Valley children or young teenagers, rather, to be involved in those camps where weekends they would go and see role models. We would go and give a pep talk in terms of them finish their education, to commit themselves not to drop out of junior high school, to go on into high school and then college, because for many of them, they had never thought of themselves as worthy of being a college student. Because in school, quite the opposite, they were never encouraged to think of themselves as a college student. So one of the things we started trying to say to our community is don't talk about if your child goes to school, talk about when your child goes to school, already setting the tone that you will be going.

So those were some of the changes. The interesting thing among the many things that we did with the public school system to try to change them and to educate them was because we had been so successful with preschool, when the Civil Rights Movement legislation, the War on Poverty legislation, came about, they created the Head Start Program, which was for low-income children between the ages of three and five, and it was a really□they call it the Cadillac preschool program, because it had everything. You had not only education; you had psychologists, you had nurses, you had social workers; you had nutritionists. That was all part of the program, so the child got a comprehensive assistance when they went to Head Start. But obviously they had to meet the federal guidelines. When we heard of that, we felt that we could apply for those funds because you could be a nonprofit and somehow have some kind of a record that you've been interested in education and then get those grants. Now, the money was funneled. The poverty money got funneled through the county of Los Angeles. When we went to apply for the county, which was a normal procedure, we were rejected. We couldn't figure out, because here we had been for now five years, more than five years, doing this as volunteers, raising our own money, and we had a waiting list. We never stopped having a waiting list. They said, "Well, there isn't any poverty in the San Fernando Valley." So we had to deal with the stereotype that everybody thought that the San Fernando Valley was full of rich people or people who didn't need the program. We tried desperately the data, to show the waiting list, to show the neighborhoods, how they were low income and so forth and so on, and that didn't pass them.

It was also a political issue, too, because they were only going to focus in a certain area where they wanted to. Chicanos, Mexican Americans, were not considered part of that political agenda. So then, bless the heart of Dr. Miguel Montes, who was the only one who could afford a round trip to Washington and back. The Education Committee sat down and drafted the proposal for the Head Start, revised it a little bit so it met, and we went directly to the federal government. At the federal government, that's how we first got our money for Head Start. We were the first agency to go directly to Washington, D.C., because we could not get it locally. From 1965 until 2006, we ran the Head Start Program. At one time we were the largest Head Start providers in the whole country. When we ended up in October of 2005, we ended with an audit that showed that we had no deficiencies at all. We ended up winning the best food program in the state of California, and we will always, always have a commitment for preschool children. We saw a different change during that period of time in terms of the intellectual□how can I put it□knowledge of a preschool child. It was really not fully respected. It was thought like a babysitting situation at Head Start because it provided also nutritional help and work with the parents. That's the other strength of Head Start. It put a lot of emphasis in educating the parents so that they could guide their children to succeed when they entered the public school system.

If anything, it grew from the image of it, other than Head Start being a babysitting situation, to when the brain research occurred that they showed that children, even before birth, that already the brain had to have stimuli, well-thought-through stimuli so that the child could be successful. One of the things that we're very proud that we did, we immediately implemented some of those findings in terms of brain research, so that a child that is bilingual has even more a network in his brain than children that are monolingual. So therefore, if anything, we should encourage children to know as many languages as possible. The other thing is that we have underestimated the child's ability to learn languages at a very early age. What had been the previous practice of the public school system is that, for example, what I went through. They didn't want us to speak Spanish, right? They looked at it as something very negative, and all of a sudden in high school, if you were going to go to college, you had to take a foreign language. It's crazy. So that confuses a kid. "Well, you didn't want me to speak Spanish. Now you want me to take four years of Spanish in order for me to college as a requirement." So you can see the problem that the school system and how it proved their inability to understand the bilingual child and the benefits of being bilingual.

ESPINO:

Excuse me for interrupting. But you knew that back then, even in the sixties, you knew?

00:19:26

TOVAR:

There was a very important man that educated us, Marcos de Leon. We've talked about Marcos de Leon. Marcos de Leon was a teacher, but his training was anthropology, and he taught us in that Education Committee of the Los Angeles County the important of bilingualism and what it did to the child in their self, that it was an identity thing, that it was integrated into the way that they thought, the way that they saw the world.

He had not been part of that era of the brain studies, but he, in his way, knew the importance, however he wanted to define it, that how enriched you were if you were bilingual and how your ability shifts from one language to another brain-wise was very important and that had to tell you something. He didn't identify it yet, but that there was something that happened in the brain cells that could be able to transmit. You've seen people, they'll be talking in English, all English, and then all of sudden, like this, they'll turn and start speaking in Spanish, and cohesive. So that he taught us. We didn't yet know the formal research that eventually came, but that also helped us in Head Start to better understand that child and develop curriculum that would enhance that ability. But it had to be well dealt with, the curriculum, and we had to work with the parents so that they, too, would know how to develop that talent of both languages.

ESPINO:

Before we keep going further, I'd like to just step back a little bit and discuss the Women's Auxiliary just a little bit more and get more detail. For example, you said the men decided there should be a women's. Is that how you recall?

00:21:2600:23:04

TOVAR:

That's how I recall. I recall because the founders were mostly men except for Antonia Tejada. I was a young woman who was very involved, and I did go to the meetings of the founding and the conceptualizing of how we would do. So it was basically□and then also, too, the other thing is that we got to remember that the Women's Movement, as it is now, was not as clearly defined as to what was anti-women's rights.

Also, some women gave in. I didn't know how□but I felt uncomfortable. I didn't know how to define it as a young woman, but I didn't feel right that we were separated. I did go to some meetings. I did go to the cake sales. I did even, I remember, I made enchiladas, and whatever didn't sell we bought it from ourselves so that we could raise the money. But it was all women. The leadership of it, the officers, of course, were women, the chairs of it and the secretaries, and it was a very active group of women. There were professional women in it and housewives, and I know that there were a couple of secretaries that worked for the L.A. Unified School District in that. Carmen Baraza was one of them, she already passed away, very, very strong woman and good leadership abilities that she had. We had another woman, Connie Barbosa. She was a very interesting woman because she had a very heavy accent but she was a sharpie, she was, and she didn't accept any bull from anybody. These were women who really were leaders, and they were very well organized and very successful, and they then even helped the other committees. They were auxiliary. Remember the word "auxiliary." So they supplemented the assistance of other committees. If there was a conference that we conducted, well, here comes the Women's Auxiliary, organizing, registering, all that kind of stuff. So they were very proactive.

This is also, you see, symbolic as to how they saw women: auxiliary to. Even though the leadership was awesome, but what were they? Auxiliary. They were helping. They were not part of that thrust. So that was the times. That was the times of the sixties. I know that some of us may not have been able to define it yet, but we were uncomfortable with that, whatever. Why is it that I have to only belong to here? I want to be part of where the decisions, the main decisions are being made. So that was something that exists, and it was accepted, even with uncomfortableness, the dual□

ESPINO:

Both sides.

TOVAR:

Yes, both sides, both the women as well as the dominant group, if you want to call it that. So it was a different time. As a matter of fact, some of the women didn't feel comfortable that some of us were in the men's groups. It was looked at as□I don't know how to explain it. It was looked like, "Oh, she wants to be in□." In some cases, not even very nicely. (Spanish phrase). "She wants to be an equal, similar, and deal back and forth with them as equals." A couple of women did feel that way.

ESPINO:

Did they tell you things to you?

00:25:20

TOVAR:

They very politely infer that. So you were aware of it, and so you even had to be□I remember the way I used to do it is that I made sure I became friends to the women so that they didn't feel like you were ostracized in a way. I don't want to exaggerate the point, but it was a quiet little message that was there. But I tried. I always made sure that I had good relationship with their wives, so they knew it was something that I was there for the business of what needed to be done. It was there not only in LACA but in other organizations. It wasn't just there. Unfortunately, it was a sign of the times.

So it raised the most money. That was the group that raised the most money. That was the women that was the backbone in terms of organizing, in terms of setting up volunteers to come in whatever project we were in. So it really was a valuable part of the organization there.

ESPINO:

Who made the decisions as far as what they did?

00:27:5600:29:3600:31:28

TOVAR:

Well, there was a general agenda of the organization. Of course, you gave input, but the final decision was the overall agency. We had, if you want to call it, a master plan, even though we didn't call it a master plan, and then the women would then find where they fitted as a group, as an organized auxiliary. They would be the helpers, if you want to put it that way, of the objectives of the group, the Education Committee or the Ways and Means Committee or whatever committee we had in terms of doing it. But they played a very valuable role, a role that we really didn't fully (unclear). I'll give you one example. The organization decided that it was going to support Cesar Chavez, his march to Sacramento, his first march to Sacramento to Governor Pat Brown. So the task to organize two busloads of people from the organization and anybody in the community to go and join Cesar in that march was headed by myself and the chair of the Women's Auxiliary. We did get the bus and we phoned the women and whoever was going to go to it. We got the bus, the signs that we were putting that we were on our way to Sacramento. So it was thrust that was going forward in doing the work. That doesn't mean that the men didn't do anything, because that's not true. Dr. Miguel Montes was a very active man, and he even put his own money at that time, which was very limited for most of us. We were much younger. We were just getting into our careers. Some of us were just finishing to get into our careers. But it was a beautiful time. It was time of ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country. We had faith in ourselves.

We felt that we could make a difference in the San Fernando Valley, especially since it was not taught and it was not believed that there were Mexicans in this area. How ironic when my parents had come here in the□well, first of all, there's a mission, San Fernando Mission. That means we were here a long while in the 1700s. There's a mission, and the population always has been here. There were

farm workers. This was mostly agricultural, so obviously we were here. We were part of that agricultural labor force. Little after little it became suburbia. After World War II when the veterans came from the war and housing projects started to be developed, then came the in-flood of non-Mexican Americans or non-Latinos or what was called Mission Indians. There's, unfortunately, very few now Mission Indians here, but those were the Indians that worked with the churches in this area. So because of that, we had to make our visibility even more dramatic, since they never thought of us as living here and being part of the community. So that was a dramatic change in the San Fernando Valley of LACA playing a part. There was a MAPA chapter, Mexican American Political Association, but that was more politically, and it wasn't as effective in terms of it. Politicians came every election time, and that was about the only time they saw us, and then they left.

But the other thing that LACA did do that sort of that MAPA felt threatened about is that we did registration, voter registration. Now, we were nonprofit and we were nonpolitical because we were 501(c)3, but to register people was nonpolitical. That was our registration. So the other thing that we did that the Los Angeles County Registrar's Office were overwhelmed, that for the first time there was a group, twenty-one of us. I'll never forget the number. Twenty-one of us Mexican Americans took what was then the practice, if you wanted to register people, and that is you went to a half-day training session on how to register voters. You carried a big packet, and you registered someone and you gave them the copy of the registration, you kept one, and you gave one to the county. Well, you know, nowadays that you don't go through that. All you do is fill out a postcard and you mail it, and that's it. But at that time you had to go through that training. If you didn't do the training, you could not register voters. So we were the largest Spanish-speaking group of people that had the Los Angeles County voter-registered voters trained to do registration, and we went door to door and we registered. All of a sudden, we got the attention of the politician. "Oh, my goodness, these Mexicans are registering other Mexicans." Because they would usually avoid our area because they didn't want to empower us, because to vote is to empower your community. So we did register voters, and we did get out the vote. At that point, we did work with some of the elected officials to get out the vote. That's when all of a sudden elected officials started coming and visiting us and trying to get what our needs were and paying attention to some of the other issues.

That's also then how we ended up, LACA ended up getting some other funds for preschoolers. We ended up then forming a joint venture, as we called it. LACA took that leadership, and what it is that we drafted a proposal that included members from NAACP, people from the nonminority community and the Mexican American community. That's when we even involved Mission Indians. We did a joint venture. We called a joint venture. We had two offices, one in San Fernando, one in Pacoima. What we did was multifamily programming. We dealt with youth leadership program, developing young people to remain in school and to be active in the community, and we educated them in terms of their self-identity. This was before Chicano Studies, in terms of putting in laymen's way of knowing who you are, take pride in your community, give to your community. We had senior citizen group that we developed in terms of providing them with what now senior citizen classes do. We also had programs in health. Actually, they let us use their facilities during the anti-war, we had drafting detention□not detention, but how to get out of the draft, because if you legally□

ESPINO:

Resistance?

00:33:17

TOVAR:

□resisted the war. Obviously our community, not all of them were sympathetic toward that. They thought we were communists, that we didn't believe in America. Quite the opposite, we thought it was an immoral war, and that was our protest. So there was that kind of activity here in the Valley.

Now, some of these things were not yet happening in the early sixties in East L.A., so we really were the ones that were doing that. Later on, East L.A. started doing some of those things, and we did work. I was very active in doing that communication. I was actually the connector between what was happening with LACA and East L.A. as far as what we were doing.

ESPINO:

The bridge.

TOVAR:

The bridge, that bridge that was there. If you meet some of the older people in East L.A., "Oh, yeah, Irene used to come to our meetings," because that was what was designated to me by LACA. I was that liaison person. So that's how I got to know what was happening in East L.A., that network that was developing, which was very important for us to start getting united and led eventually to the Chicano Moratorium, where there was representation from the Valley in the Chicano Moratorium. Some of us, especially me, I was very much involved with that coordination. So was my sister, my younger sister. She was the one that dealt with the youth in that part so that she was almost my right-hand person in that effort.

ESPINO:

Can you just give me a timeline, before we go on to that next effort?

TOVAR:

What I have been basically describing was the sixties.

ESPINO:

But the voter registration, would that be□

00:35:1800:37:2900:39:21

TOVAR:

That was in 1964, because at that very time there was "No on 14." I don't know if you're acquainted with No on 14. That was the housing discrimination bill. Actually, they tried to confuse it. No on 14 really meant that you were□let's see. That ought to tell you now. It was reversed. In other words, if you said no on 14, you were really saying no discrimination, but it wasn't that simple. It was a little tricky there. I can't now describe it how it was.

So we took on that. We supported no discrimination in housing, because it was especially important to the San Fernando Valley because at that time the San Fernando Valley was getting a lot of aerospace money, and there was a lot of companies that were doing war and aerospace. It was an aerospace industry. So engineers were coming into the Valley and moving into the Valley, and they were being discriminated against. Two examples that I remember so clearly, one was an African American engineer who came, and he had a cross burned in front of his (unclear). The same thing happened to a Chinese that came here, and he had a cross burned on him. So the Valley has had some very embarrassing, very shameful moments in the past. As you know, minorities were so-called "allowed" to live on this side of the Valley, the northeast Valley, as it was called. The west Valley used to be white. It was an unspoken thing, but that was part of that housing discrimination practice. So we took a stand, LACA, and that was in the 1964, to be exact, that that initiative started. Thank god it was defeated, so that in effect it said you cannot discriminate on the basis of race in housing, and that was where we also became partners with the San Fernando Fair Housing Council, which was a group of progressive people who were against discrimination, any form of discrimination. As you know, that was the point of the highest awareness of the Civil Rights Movement, so that was part of the role that LACA played. It was actually a supporter of the Civil Rights Movement in terms of nondiscrimination in housing, education, employment, etc., that we played a role in. We were the only organization that was Mexican, because there was no other organization, period.

So it played a very key role in our role as Mexican Americans as far as the Civil Rights Movement, and we also were the leaders in establishing poverty programs that came from the Civil Rights Movement money, the War against Poverty, because we did have Head Start. We ended up having a program that was called NAPP, or the Neighborhood Adult Participation Program. That was in Pacoima. I actually was its first poverty director of the whole San Fernando Valley. Then we also brought a joint effort, and those were all in the sixties, in the mid sixties, immediately passing of the anti-poverty war legislation by Johnson. So we were the only game in town as far as fighting. Then we brought in people from other than Mexican American communities. We invited□at that time there was a small African American population. We brought them into that joint venture, that coalition of non-Latino Mexican Americans to join in it so that we did coexist in the efforts of fighting poverty in the San Fernando Valley. For a long, long time that was the only game in town. We also, under LACA's leadership and Dr. Miguel Montes, we brought in money that established the Northeast Valley Health Corporation, which again was dealing with the health needs of the poor in the San Fernando Valley. Again, that was a coalition that we brought in so that we did take a leadership role. It's very accurate in terms of working with other groups, other religious groups, other racial groups, in terms of battling the War against Poverty.

If you want to talk about what LACA did, we took in a program, it started off as a program because we didn't end up getting VISTA money and we did a youth program that we brought. We'd had a program that it was for people that were coming out of prisons, so like the halfway houses that they talked about. Eventually it became a full-range nonprofit it took kind of on its own. Now it still exists. It's one of the largest agencies, but it now has turned more in the direction of how to get people out of drugs, how to rehabilitate people who have been on drugs, but also, too, other health needs of the community, whether it's prescription drugs or whether it's drugs that are illegal or whether we deal with the effects of the members of people who have been in drugs. How do we help those families? How do we keep the family together? That was the efforts of the leadership of the Latin American Civic Association, which really was really dynamic at that time.

ESPINO:

Incredible, all the different things that you were involved in just in such a short period of time.

00:41:3800:43:4800:45:3000:47:4300:50:23

TOVAR:

Yes. But that was the excitement of the times. Now in retrospect, I said I gave every moment of my life to that, but I tell you I have no regrets and I'm glad I played, no matter how small or how people may measure my time, that I played a role in it, no matter from big to little, middle or whatever. I was always involved in it. It enriched my life. It gave me something back. So I don't want to feel like I was so philanthropic or so noble, because I did get something back. I got the satisfaction, which, believe it or not, is a reward in itself of knowing that you were able as a human being as one person to help another human being.

It goes back to my parents' training, because I saw it, as poor as my parents were. You know the jacket story that I've told you about my father. He gave his jacket, when we had all sacrifice earning of money so my dad could have a jacket, and comes a homeless man and he gives it away that very day. It was brand new. Then my mother's role, who was an incredible woman. Here she was because of her time, because of the Mexican Revolution, she never finished her education, which she to her dying day regretted that she had not had a formal education. She became a lady that was helping the public nurse, because there wasn't any health centers here in the Valley in that era, which was somewhere in the forties and early and mid fifties. She was a (Spanish phrase). She would help the nurse deliver babies, and she didn't get paid but she did it because she wanted to. She felt bad that here were these young women who got pregnant, and the culture of that time was that if a girl got pregnant, you threw her out of the house. It was a shame for the family, and there was no support system for her. So my mom, through the public health nurse, they would identify the women, and my mother would help deliver the babies. Then after the public nurse left, that poor woman, that young woman, she was really a young woman and here she had a baby. The father definitely was not around. Her family was not around. So I remember my dad and my mom would get in, and since we always were together, they took us everywhere we went. We would get in the back of the car, and my dad would drive the car. Then my mother would come to this empty lot with a little shaggy□made out of cardboard. She would get down, and I know she would take a bundle, and I know she would have milk. When she would come back, she didn't have the milk and she didn't have the bundle. What she would actually be giving them was clothes for the baby, because the baby didn't have any clothes, and milk for the baby.

So I guess I saw that there was no big to-do, and my mother bragging about what she'd done. She very quietly did it, and my dad accepted that that was part of it, and we went home. Then the next one would happen. Then the thing that happened was when my mom passed away, I remember, as I was saying earlier, she's buried in Burbank. I remember when we were getting out of the freeway, there was a turn that our car made. For whatever reason I turned back, and as I turned back, I saw a long line of cars. I just quickly sort of made a mental thought, oh, jeez, so many people came to my mother's funeral. When we got down to bury her, there were a lot of people I didn't recognize, and there were a lot of young people. Later on I found out those were the women that my mother had delivered and the children which she had delivered. So how can you possibly not learn something from your mother? How can you not learn something from your father? Because both of them, both of them felt the same, and yet we didn't have money. It wasn't like my dad could write a check and, here, make the contribution. But it was their persons that they gave, and I think that's how I also look at life. I never look at if I do this, am I going to get a check for it? It's just a given. You give and that's it, period. You don't expect anything. You just gave.

And what is the reward? Supposedly you're a better person. Religiously you're taught as a little kid you'll go to heaven, straight up to heaven. But those are the rewards that have no dollar signs. Those are the rewards that you just□oh, my god, I remember that kid, he was going to drop out of school and I got him to that program and now he's graduating. I mean, that is a reward. That is a reward. That is the best kind of medicine for you. That's the best kind of medicine. So there are rewards in giving, and it doesn't mean dollars. But, ironically, you do that, and in my life it has helped me professionally. I never planned to help someone because I would get this, and when I was considered for the first poverty program in the San Fernando Valley, I didn't know that there were those programs. I had volunteered my time to this Education Committee, and I was recommended by the county Education Committee to the people who had just gotten funds for that program, that "There's a young woman over here who's been working with low-income families, and she's about to graduate from college, and maybe she might be able to take that, be able to run that program." Of course, I was scared of the dickens when I was approached, and I denied. I didn't want to take it because I didn't think I was capable of running a program that would affect people. I'll always remember what the administrator told me. He said, "Irene, if 75 percent, think about it, 75 percent of your decisions are right, you're a damn good administrator." I was thinking in student's thinking, 75 is like a C, and I was expecting to say 85 percent or

90 percent had to be good. He made me feel so guilty, that I accepted the job and from then started my career, in which I believe it's been a privilege and an honor to serve low-income families, to change their life, to break the cycle of poverty.

Those were the sixties. Those were the sixties, the exciting sixties, and then in the seventies I got involved with the role of the universities and higher education. But I'll tell you, that in itself, the sixties were so exciting. There's no words that can fully make somebody understand how exciting it was and how as a young woman at that era how□I mean, you didn't think about it. You did it because that was what you had an obligation to give. You didn't even feel so much that the word "obligation," but it was almost like a privilege to do it, that that was it. So it was a gratifying era. It doesn't mean there were others that criticized us and that were against the poverty programs or like the No on 14. My brother, who dared put a sticker in his car on the No on 14, they scraped his car, and they must have taken something sharp on the window. They scraped the windows. That happened. So it didn't mean that there wasn't repercussions that came because you took those stands, but as an overall it was a good feeling of community, of coalitions, of groups that believed in the same ideals of equality. Those were precious things. What is so sad is that now we're coming to almost like a turnaround, and now we've having an increase in poverty. Now those programs that could potentially help break the cycle is not there, because we now don't have funds to fund some of those programs, and there's resistance toward anything that would so-call help low-income families. Now we're talking about not so much class difference but fiscal differences. Now the middle class is feeling what it is to be poor, and it's regrettable because the funds are not there for anyone. So if you think about it, if the middle class right now cannot feed their children, if you think that they can't find a home, they're homeless, they're living in cars, think about what the poor that have been there must be feeling. And the resources are not there, so it's really tragic because this is a different kind of battle against the poor. It will be very differently defined than when the sixties. This is a different kind of definition, from my point of view.

But the seventies got us to a different level. Then by then, we started moving kids into the universities, to college. All of a sudden we were getting a little bit more graduates. But we had to fight that, too, because, as you recall, there was a governor who made it very difficult for state universities to have EOP programs. So we had to fight that too. So in the early seventies I was very much involved with CSUN. I was very much involved with the community colleges, along with other people, to make sure that we did maintain and support the EOP programs and that we did recruit young people to go to the universities. We did sit in interviews as to who would be the students that would qualify for the EOP program. I got involved in those interviews. We not only looked at their grades, but that wasn't it. What is the aspiration of this young person? What is the motivating factor that wants this young man or woman to go into college? So we got involved as a community with college administrators in those interviews to qualify those slots, as they were called. We would fill slots that we had for the kids to be in the EOP program.

00:51:54

ESPINO:

Are you still referring to LACA? When you say "we got involved," are you still referring to LACA?

00:53:4200:55:52

TOVAR:

LACA was part of that, because I've always been a member of LACA. So I got involved in that in that role, basically. But also, too, I got involved as an individual also out of my commitment, but basically because I was active in LACA as that representative that I got involved in it. Out of that we also brought in other people so that different committees were being formed that were not necessarily part of LACA, but that had the same common interest so we worked with them, partnered. What the word is now is "partnership." We didn't hear those words then, but it was coalition-building, that sort of thing at that time. We did do that, so that that was very, very important. We wanted now to get our kids to go on into college, too, and our main thing was getting teachers, again because of that constant concern about the role of education in our community because we know that that is the greatest equalizer. That is the greatest weapon against the war on poverty. If you have a college education□well, who knows now? But if you had a college education, you were likely to have a good job, got good pay, you could afford a better home, better employment, a better life for you and your family. So we did make that thrust, and we wanted especially to get teachers who were Mexican Americans, who were bilingual, who were Latinos, so they could understand and work with our children in the public schools, because more and more we were becoming the dominant student body. We had always been there, but now all of a sudden it was many, many kids, so we wanted to make sure that we created teachers who would understand that child.

Many of us worked, and I worked even, in training programs, because then L.A. Unified School District and the state universities, and probably the UC system, too, got grants from the federal government to train teachers, to train teachers who go into minorities, and they would□what is it? They would, I guess, erase your loan if you served for two years in a low-income schools and communities. So I was invited a number of times, especially at CSUN, to do some training of student teachers so that they would understand the minority community, the Spanish-speaking communities, their culture, the languages, how to work with parents, since I had worked in Head Start. By "work" I mean I had been not work paid, but had been one of its founders. So I played that role, too, in terms of working with the universities. And work, I don't mean pay work. They give you a stipend, $50 or something like that, that you would go and you would be part of a workshop, and you would work with those teachers and you would work with the professors to start getting that new role of teachers that went in. Right now I can't even remember the names of those programs, but they were training programs for the teachers that were federally funded. I can tell you that was in the late sixties and early seventies. I worked at CSUN until 1973, playing a role of the liaison. Now, that was a paid position. That was a full-time position, being the liaison between the university and the community, the

Spanish-speaking community. The same thing happened in the black community, because at that time CSUN had been working with the students, the young students, the minority students, that had been becoming part of that movement to get students in, minority students into the universities.

The student organization has been negotiating with the administration to bring in EOP programs, some sort of (unclear) right now. During that time, apparently the negotiations weren't going very well, and the president who was supposed to have implemented and committed himself to the students to have those classes went back, and so the students burned the Administration Building. So they got the message, and so then the students were determined to have EOP programs. So what the school did is they brought in people from the community, graduates like me, and see how we could so-called calm the troops or how could we work with the university. So, again, Lou Garcia and myself□Lou Garcia had been working with CYO, the Catholic Youth Organization. He and I and a woman by the name of Lupe Ramirez, who was very active in LULAC from the San Fernando Valley, we met with the president of the campus, and we tried to see how we could talk to the students to see that they were going to bring in an EOP program. This time they were going to keep their word. How could we resolve the tensions and the dangers that there were? Because remember that time was the era when the police started coming into campuses, so that happened here in this Valley.

ESPINO:

Were there any arrests of those students?

00:57:46

TOVAR:

Oh, yes, there was. As a matter of fact, some of those young people ended up then going□oh, there was arrests, and we had to help bail them out, because there was so-called social protests, this sort of thing. So that was another role we played in terms of seeing how we could raise the money to get them out of jail.

Some of those students ended up going to law school. For a while they paid dearly for their social conscience and that sort of thing, because when they passed the bar, but then they were not allowed to practice law because that had been a felony. So then came the battle with the attorneys. I was not directly involved since I was not an attorney, but being a supporter of how could we get that erased because of the times. So some of those young people who then became attorneys, we had to fight to see how they could remove that from their record and so that they could practice law. So it was an interesting era. It was a trying era. It was an exciting era. It was a tragic era. It had all these emotions, so it was quite a challenging time.

ESPINO:

Did you know that these kids were going to burn the building ahead of time?

01:01:49

TOVAR:

No, had no idea. I don't think they shared that with a lot of us, because it was mainly a student effort, and by then I was out of the campus and by then I was doing my own thing with administering poverty programs. Then all of a sudden we knew that there was going to be□we had been part of getting students in, recruiting students to apply. We had worked with the schools to make an effort of counseling, to improve their counseling, to get them into the universities, and to know that there's loans and that sort of thing. Now there was a great resentment at the university after that. Now, normally, you would think that you understand that, there was a building that was burned, not by all of us, but then there were people who never wanted us there. That was also very interesting because once we were able to cool the students down, once we were able to bring the EOP program□and I did serve in a committee, as a result of being invited to come in by the president of the campus, to, one, calm the troops, explain, "Let's keep it cool. Things will be happening. You will be getting your EOP program." We did sit in committees that brought in the EOP program. We did play a role in interviewing the professors that were teaching Chicano Studies. That's how Chicano Studies came in CSUN. I was part of those interviews along with Lupe Ramirez, along with Lou Garcia, who I just mentioned. We sat and we interviewed, like I said before, who would those potential professors be at the Chicano Studies Department, who would be the staff of the EOP program. That's where the students did me a great honor. They wanted me to be the liaison between the university and the community. So I became what they called the Chicano Center director. Again, I served for three years at the university during that transition period. That's where I ended up, as I told you once, talking to parents who said (Spanish phrase), parents who had always been very protective of their daughters. Again, we deal with the issue should

they□some parents felt, "Well, why should she got to the university? She's going to get married. She's going to have children." So I had to be the intermediary who went and visited the homes of the parents. Some of them were even in East L.A., and I would go visit them at home when the father was there and try to convince him that this was for the good of the daughter to get a college education, that in case her husband died or she got divorced, she would have to be self-supporting. If she had children, she had to support the child.

Now, after I pleaded and did everything I could think of to persuade the father, and if I finally was able to convince him, he would then do the worst thing to me. "Okay, Miss Tovar, I will say yes, but if anything happens to my daughter, I'm coming to you." Oh, my god, that was the scariest thing. (Laughs) Then I would go visit that young girl. I'd say, "Don't you ever do anything wrong, because my neck is at stake." "Oh, no, Miss Tovar." (Laughs)

ESPINO:

A lot of responsibility.

TOVAR:

You bet. You bet. But, you see, that was a big cultural clash. First generation, the fathers. In my situation, my parents knew that it was very important for me to go to college. In other families, and I don't say that this is predominantly, but in other families there would exist parents who didn't believe a girl, even then, should go to college, because, after all, she was going to be a housewife. She was going to take care of babies. That's what she needed to learn how to do. We were trying to make a big cultural change. We were trying to make a big change in how we saw young women, Latina Mexicanas, that they did have a role in higher education, that they could and they would benefit, not only in the society but in their own personal life, that they would benefit from it.

ESPINO:

Did you believe what you were saying as far as if her husband□I mean, was that the important argument that you gave the father about the husband dying or□

TOVAR:

Or divorce.

01:03:29

ESPINO:

□or divorce?

01:05:2601:08:10

TOVAR:

Absolutely. Because, would you believe that was the most persuasive part of it all? Not how directly what it would do to your culture, your spiritual thing, or anything like that. Man does not live by bread alone. No, that didn't sell. But it was very practical, very practical. How will she support herself? I would say it very respectfully, "Mr. Hernandez, can you afford not to support another child?" He was barely able to support, because he didn't have that education, that training, and it rang a bell. Yes. What if they have children? What would happen? That seemed to me the most persuasive, especially to the hardcore father. The mother was always, I found, much more receptive, but as you know, going back again, (Spanish phrase), "I have to have permission from my husband to say yes." The women, I always found, were much more receptive for their young girls to go to college. They resisted, I guess, the over-protectiveness that the man was always supposed to be about his daughters. Maybe that was that cultural value there. I tried to see how that same value would

be translated into protecting her once she got married and/or became divorced, become still self-sufficient. That was part of that responsibility, that love for their daughter. It was challenging. Interesting enough, I'll tell you, not one single one of those young women that I had to go bat for them with their parents, ever, ever put my neck on the line. They did do the right thing. Those are the kind of things that are a reward, because you went there believing so strongly in that, and you put all you into it, and then the father says yes.

Then you can go back to the girl and you can say, "Hey, you're okay. You can stay. You can live in the dorm." Because some of them lived outside of the area, so they had to live in the dorm. Then that's where we ended up having those Open Houses where we inviting the parents to come to the university, and the Chicano Studies professors would talk to the parents and say what it involved, what was college life like, and then what were their services, etc., so that it didn't become something very foreign. All of a sudden parents for the first time were going to a university and meeting with profesores and talking. So it was a change. One day I guess some sociologist will do some extensive studies of what kind of social change, change of values, change of perceptions occurred in the Chicano community, because we're one of the largest Chicano Studies Department in the whole nation. We have the largest Latino Chicano student body at CSUN than anywhere else. Thirty-five percent of the student population is Latino. Thirty percent is white. The other one is a mixture of Asian and African American. But it's the largest student Latino Chicano student body. So we have a stake in that, you know. We do. That is a lasting one. That's a chain cutter of the poverty program. Many of those students now are principals of the local schools, are teachers, are administrators, are counselors. That was that era that started all of that. I remember being a student of five of us to now being 35 percent of the student body population. Talk about a social change, social dynamics that occurred on that campus from this community. So those were really the seventies. Those portrayed all the different things that were happening, the crisis of the burning of the Administrative Building, and then how did we reconcile that clash. Then how do we implement it? What was the result of all of that? What did we produce? We produced teachers. We produced administrators. We produced hopefully more sensitive educators that could work with our children.

Now it's obvious that we're going to have to□because the need was so great in our education, now that technology has become much more, the technology age, now we've got to gear kids also to the mathematics and the science and the information revolution that's taking place right now, the computer system. We need engineers. We've always needed them. But now it is, see, we're going to survive as an ethnic group and being productive earning people, salary-earning people. That's where the direction of it will go. We'll need more nurses. We'll need more doctors. There's no doubt that the sciences will need mathematicians. Let alone my other favorite, our writers, the people that deal with the spirit, the lifting of the spirit, the artists, the arts. We have a great film industry here in the Valley. Some of the big producers live here in the Valley. I'm very active now with the Alumni Association. As a matter of fact, tonight I have a meeting of the Alumni Association.

ESPINO:

What time?

TOVAR:

I have to be there by five-thirty.

ESPINO:

Okay. So we'll wrap up in about ten minutes.

01:10:0101:12:0701:14:04

TOVAR:

I'm very active in it because I want to make sure we take the next step, and that is that how do we then get those Latinos that graduated, how can we get them back as alumni and playing a role in protecting what we already have because, as you know, the trustees of the California State University system right now are going through some crises.

An additional 9 percent interest in tuition, at the same time the issue now has become new presidents, are we going to pay them more than the President of the United States? Some college presidents earn more than the President of the United States. People are unemployed and so forth. So how do we still maintain it open to everybody? What is so frightening in that we have a big stake, we as Latinos have a big stake in this, is that since there is not enough funds, we're going to be limiting enrollment. That means many of our

young people will be x'ed out. They're going to start putting higher requirements for you to enter the university. That means a lot of our kids again are going to be left out. And in it, too, just kids in general. But we have a stake in our kids because we're such a large population, and we want to create productive, contributing members of our society. We want taxpayers to be there, one, is to relieve all those people that think we are not earners, that we're just takers, but also, too, because we want to break the cycle of poverty. We want to create more people that can come into the profession so they can be self-sufficient and not work in jobs that will no longer exist. I mean, just the very practical aspect of it. So those are the challenges, and they're hard challenges. I really believe, having lived this long, on these issues, that this is going to be harder than anything we've ever challenged, harder than the sixties, the seventies, because at that time we had better resources, financial resources. There was resistance, but we were able to deal with it. This time, there's resistance toward us. There isn't the resources. So it's much more serious because now it's also hitting the nonminority middle class, and the monies are not there. So it is a very serious challenge.

But I do not ever give up. That's the other thing that we (unclear). For a while there, I betrayed myself because I'm an optimist. For a while there, I thought, "Oh, my god, it's impossible. How can we battle now this other battle that's coming that's even harder?" But I think there will be a way. It's not going to be easy. It's going to be very difficult. We will have to be even more committed to what we were in the sixties and seventies, and we're going to have to be very open that the resistance is there, not only because we're just plain Mexican Americans and the anti-immigrant issue that falls to whether you're born here or not born here. I think I've mentioned that the LAPD just, what is it, about a month ago gave a report that hate crime has decreased, but hate crime against Mexican and they use the word "Mexican Americans" is very high, has increased. So we have that issue that we've got to deal with, let alone with the issue that the resources are limited and will not accommodate our large population, that the doors are closing to the doors that could open the possibility of us entering the American Dream, the middle class, let alone that society as a whole will not be able to make it easier for you to have a home. Where is that generation going to be going to? What will be the results of that if we don't fight, if we don't be advocates? Maybe that's a better word, "advocates," for our families, for our community, for our children. How are we going to make the schools more responsible on the math and science, the teaching of it in the universities and the community colleges?

So we have a lot of challenges, and they're not easy. But how do we get those that benefited out of those sixties and seventies, how are we going to get them more reunited to be advocacy front for those issues?

ESPINO:

There's some criticism that many activists from that period got involved in War on Poverty programs, got jobs, got a degree, got an education, and then entered the middle class, and didn't keep that same fire that you, yourself, has kept. Do you think that's a true statement?

01:16:1801:18:38

TOVAR:

I think that in part it's true. In part, some forgot. I guess the temptation is there for that, because, hey, I want to go home. I want to be with my family. I want the benefit of now being able to maybe take a vacation, which my parents never knew about vacations. That was never in our agenda. We lived in Pacoima. We stayed in Pacoima. Maybe we would visit our families in Texas, but it was never considered a vacation. We went and we stayed at their homes. We didn't go to a hotel or rent a yacht. Like some of our own in our own community own boats, they are very well-off, and, thank god, because that was part of the battle. But also another thing that was very, very strong was coming back to your community. Some of them have not come back, and I often tell them, you don't have to come back by picketing. You don't have to come back by even protesting. Give me a check so I can serve one more child, so I can serve one more program. Then sometimes a phone call, a phone call to your legislator, a letter writing, writing. Or give a little bit of time to a good organization that you entrust, that you notice really leading with the community. Volunteer an hour once a week, two hours a week, or that sort of thing.

So it doesn't always have to be how they experienced it, because with us it was a battle, always confronting the police. It was very uncomfortable. But then there are those, and I'm privileged to know them, who still do their thing. They have never become that well-off, because there isn't too much benefit of you being an advocate for the poor. You don't become rich being an advocate for the poor. There's some attorneys that I know that that's all they've dedicated their life to, helping the rights of the poor. I still know them. I'm privileged to know them. They're dedicated. They were part of that era. There are those who have committed themselves to be the best teacher possible, to do more than is being asked of the regular teacher. There are those. I belong to an organization of Latinas, Comisión Femenil of the San Fernando Valley. These are all comprised of Latinas who went through that process and now every year are having the Adelante Mujeres Conference in which they bring young Chicanas from junior high and high school. For a day they bring in role models of Chicanas who have been successful that have struggled with their education, their poverty, and have made it and then have come back and are serving the community. So there are those that have. It's not a blank statement that all of them did. There is a mixture of that. I'm glad that that still tells me that it works, that in the process there will be those that we will lose and who have benefited, but also, too, we have maintained quite a few that are still giving and continue to give and who are now talking about their legacy. What legacy am I going to leave for the next generation? So it's a mixture. It's a mixture. But I feel saddened, obviously, by those that have forgotten how they got there and that there were people who ended up in jails, people who ended had their heads banged up. I saw that during the Chicano Moratorium. I saw the blood, I saw the bone of a skull of young people, and I'm not exaggerating, because they did

protest, or those who were running away from the protest and the police still came and beat them.

The police also have changed. That's the other thing that we need to□but we have to constantly be on the vanguard. We have to constantly. Right now I foresee this Occupied L.A. or Washington or the 99 Movement, I see the potential growth more and more as we become more frustrated over the lack of ability of being upwardly mobile, and the poor will be most dramatically affected by it. They already are, but hopefully we will keep the message going that give back to the community. You have a responsibility. You benefitted from that movement, now you owe it something, and you owe it by giving back in varieties of ways. So hopefully that will happen.

ESPINO:

I don't know if you want to stop now.

TOVAR:

Yes, because I've got to get ready.

ESPINO:

Next time, talking about giving back and someone who has been there in the very beginning, it would be great to get your impression of□

TOVAR:

You know, do me a critique, too, because I'm so busy lately with that, so I can give more time to think through before I talk to you how I'm not doing this or what I□I really welcome that. I'm not the kind of person that will get upset if you criticize me, because I want to grow. I don't mean in size. (Laughs)

ESPINO:

Okay. I'm going to shut the recorder off now. I'll let you know what I'd like to talk about next time, off the record. (End of December 7, 2011 interview)

SESSION FIVE (December 15, 2011)

00:00:07

ESPINO:

This is Virginia Espino. Today's December 15. I'm interviewing Irene Tovar at her home in Mission Hills.

Today I'd like to start with your experience at CSUN and your relationship with Dr. Rudy Acuña, how you met him and how you became active with him and the Chicano Movement.

00:02:0600:04:18

TOVAR:

I'll start basically at the time that I had already graduated, because the story of me and CSUN, it's a very different story than most Latinos are now facing. Mine was when there was only five Latinos in our whole campus that were full-time. But after I left the university, I was working in a poverty program. I was the director, and I was active in the community so I was known in the community. We had been hearing in the community that the students were trying to bring the EOP program to CSUN. At that time, it was called the lily-white school. That's what it was called because it was. The student body, I mean, there were no people of color. We were conspicuous with our absence. But it was a different era, a different mental thinking. Nowadays we take it, oh, it's integrated. We just pass by and we assume that that's how it should be. At that time it was quite the opposite for us, and we were sensitive to it, as graduates especially. But I was active already in the community, and we had been hearing that the students, the few that were now coming in, were trying to negotiate with the administration for an EOP program, and it involved the MECHA, and it also involved the Black Student Organization. They had formed a coalition, and they were negotiating with the administration for that.

At one point, they had been promised that they were going to get it, but they had had many frustration moments with the administration, that they would, they wouldn't, and you know young people are not going to take it, at that time especially. So what happened as a protest because it was withdrawn, they burned the Administration Building. So obviously, unfortunately, in our country, until there's twenty that die, we don't put a stop sign, right? It had to come, unfortunately, to that stage, so the administration got all shook up and they wanted to see how we could bring some people from the community and enable the students to sort of calm down and see how we could negotiate things and resolve all the grievances that the students had. So I was one of the person that was called in. So was a man by the name of Lou Garcia. So was a lady by the name of Guadalupe Ramirez. The same thing happened in the African American community. Leaders within that community were also called in, too, for them to work with the African American students and for us as Chicanos to work with the Latino community. At that time, Rudy Acuña was a teacher, not from CSUN, but he was a teacher in the public school system and had been active with the Latin American Civic Association that I've mentioned before, in the Education Committee and had, along with other Chicano teachers, built different programs for our organization. At that time we started talking. The demands of the students was to have an EOP program, to have a Chicano Studies Department, and to see how we could integrate more of faculty into the campus. So we played the role of the community coming in to sort of help negotiate and assist the students in their grievances. The result of that was that Rudy did become the first chair of the Chicanos Studies Department.

The department formed a committee. Well, actually, it was a committee not only for the Chicano Studies Department, but to deal with the grievances that students had brought because the administration was now ready to give in to the requests of the students. So we as community people sat on this committee, and our role was really to not only be an intermediary between the students and the campus but also the Latino community, the Chicano community, and the campus, and also to review. We were to review the status of the EOP program. We were to review the status of the Chicano Studies program. We served and we interviewed potential faculty for the Chicano Studies Department. We also served as interviewers for the EOP program staffing. The students created a position that was called someone who would be a liaison between the Chicano community and the campus, and they called it the Community Outreach Program. In the end, what happened is that we made all those things happen, and things sort of, from the students' point of view, felt that their demands had been met? But there was a lot of tension, and in some cases even animosity, toward what had been complied by the administration, and the reason being is that there was resistance for minorities to come in by some people, and there was□ (Interruption)

ESPINO:

There was resentment.

00:06:3200:08:25

TOVAR:

Yes. There was really serious, even hateful things that happened to the new people that were coming in that were being hired, and I'll give you two examples. One of them is that a young man had been hired to be faculty in the Chicano Studies Department. Remember that not only was CSUN lily-white, so was Northridge. That was the middle-class haven where minorities did not live.

So this professor, a young professor, there was a store in one corner, a grocery store, and his wife had gone to buy some groceries on her way to pick him up from the university. Well, he somehow or other got to the store and was walking around looking for her in the store. Well, they called the police that he looked suspicious. So the police came at the store and they were going to arrest him. Then when he told them he was a professor at CSUN, well, they knew this was a phony. The call came in to the program for us to justify whether it was true, that this professor really□was he really a professor at CSUN. That's one of the city. Now, that's the town, right? Then another example of it was that one of the secretaries to the EOP program was accused of using a state car, and they had seen her. One of the staff faculty□now I can't remember exactly whether it was faculty□that had seen her on off-hours using the car. They pinpointed who that Latina was, Chicana was. It happened that she was in a meeting at that time. But from our point of view at that time we felt that they had fabricated just to harass, and there was really very hostile expressions that were given, both by the clerical, as well as there were those that wanted to make that happen in terms of professors, the most liberals ones that were also supporting the students. But as a whole, there was a lot of hostility.

It has taken a while for it to□well, now it's a different kind of a situation, but it's still not what it should be as far as integrating of faculty

and staff in the university. I must be fair. It has made great strides. We're just about to lose a good president that we had, very supportive of the EOP program and the Chicano Studies. What a change in history, right? But those students who ended up burning the building, when they went on to finish their education, some of them went to law school. What happened because it was considered a felony, what they did, they were not allowed. They took the bar exam, and they passed the bar exam first time, which ought to tell you what kind a caliber of young people they were as far as their studies, but they were rejected because they had a felony, so there had to be some action taken legally to remove the felony and to know it was a protest on injustice of the time so that they could now practice law.

ESPINO:

How did you feel about that tactic, burning a building?

00:10:28

TOVAR:

First of all, I didn't know about it. I'm sorry. The most honest thing I can tell you, I am so sorry that it had to come to a point that students felt that was their only alternative. They knew who the community was. I think the administrators, who were much more sophisticated, much more politically wise, at least I hope so, would have contacted some of us in the community. We didn't know it had gotten to that stage. We knew there had been conflict, but we would never have thought that they would have gone back on the students. Again, it showed a lack of understanding of how serious this meant to these young students, and in a way it also reflected how little knowledge they understood students who believe in a cause. Here they were, a university who they deal with students.

But it was a different era. It was a different era. In this country they had not yet seen that kind of student protest. I remember my history class at CSUN, they would refer to the South American students who were in Chile or Peru or some other country who were turning over buses, and we were so indignated because that was happening over there. In this country, never, and yet we ended up having those experiences.

ESPINO:

It was one of the few, right, of the actual Chicano students, the most violent□

TOVAR:

To my knowledge, yes. To my knowledge it was.

ESPINO:

□in California.

TOVAR:

Because everything after that, I think it was a lesson to administrators, too, because the monies were there for those kind of programs, and there was a great justification for the university systems, higher education, period, to start integrating those students into the public educational system. It was a public institution. It wasn't a private university. I really think it really showed the insensitivity and the lack of ability of the administration to have□why did they didn't assemble us prior to this getting to this point? Why didn't they better communicate with the community? "Look, we're having problems with Chicano students, African Americans. They're demanding this. This is the reason we don't think it's possible." Nothing like that until the burning of the building. (Interruption)

00:12:15

ESPINO:

I was going to ask you if you had a chance to speak with the students afterwards. Did you have a one-to-one conversation with any of the students after the burning?

TOVAR:

Well, I had the conversation with the students after we were brought in. I did know some of the students because they came from our community, but I did not have that opportunity until after, when we sat down with them and we got briefed from them as terms of what had happened and why it had happened and the role that we could play to see how those negotiations that had stopped, how could we help them happen. We also were there to see were they justifiable. Were these things that were things that could be done? You know what is so tragic? That they were doable. They were doable. I never was , obviously, in the meetings, so I don't know what the tone of the meetings were. I never did find out exactly what the tone was at the moment that the administration stopped it, and they never did really disclose that, at least to our knowledge that we were there. But we did talk to the students. They were very committed. They really believed in integrating the higher education system. I did respect them. I may not have agreed was that the way to do it, but I don't know what other options they had since apparently they also didn't come to us and maybe because just lack of experience and knowing. Now our students are much more sophisticated that they can come to the community, ask for support on that. But it was very tragic that they had to come to that point.

ESPINO:

I think it was you who'd said something about it was about a generation of trying to figure out how to deal with your anger.

TOVAR:

Yes.

00:14:13

ESPINO:

Something about anger and channeling it and expressing it.

TOVAR:

I don't know if it was me, but I have often addressed that issue, how do you deal with it at those times. Remember, we were, if you want to call it, the pioneers of this kind of activism. There's always been activism in the Mexican American community. You can look back in history and you can go way back to the late eighties, 1800s and so forth, mid, even. It's interesting if you ever have a chance to read some of the letters that the Mexican governors, when California belonged to Mexico, wrote and how dismayed and disappointed and just how sad their letters of how they were treated now that they were the conquered. But, anyway, I think what happens is we didn't know. We were doing it (Spanish phrase), if you want to put it that way. But the thing about it that I think is sad on it is that when you're committed to something you're truly believing it and you don't have any other objectives other than to deal with justice where it needs to be corrected, that the penalties are rather high if you take those position and you stand by them. I, unfortunately, happened to witness many of those young people who took stands, and in a way we didn't understand completely how the system works when it feels threatened, whether right or wrong. If it feels that their status, their position, their power is going to diminish, how they retaliate back. Hopefully, we're starting to learn a little bit more the role of the protestor, the role of who's trying to bring some justice, how does the system them react to those people, and how is it that we can (Interruption)

00:16:13

ESPINO:

Okay. Back to where we were. I'm sorry.

TOVAR:

I forgot where we were.

ESPINO:

You were telling me about your perspective on where your generation was on the vanguard and you didn't realize it.

00:18:3300:20:15

TOVAR:

No, we didn't. I guess if you're an activist, sometimes we're the worst historians. We're stuck with the ideal that we want to reach, and at that time, and I'm talking about that era, we we were first generation. We can say like nowadays, or Chicanos can say, "Well, my father the attorney says," and they know the language. We hadn't. The majority of us didn't have parents that were professionals. They were from farm workers to factory workers, so it was a different world, a different lack of information that would introduce us to how the system works and how it retaliates and how to negotiate. We knew we wanted this and we went for it, and we wouldn't accept anything, or even then we confronted it, and that was it. We paid for it dearly, not only sometimes by even life, if we talk about the Southwest, what was happening there, talk about the farm workers, which we supported. They died. They were killed by the sheriffs of those local areas, and we supported them. I mean, there were other very painful things. Kids that were in their eighteens who were smacked right on the head, and you saw them bleeding and many other things. We didn't know them and the system also didn't know us. It was an era where the system really thought everybody was a communist who didn't march the same way that they did. We didn't know how to respond also to them. We knew that they were resisting us, that they were not going to give us our opportunities, that we had the right. We were understanding our rights, and we felt passionately about our rights. We could see around us in our neighborhoods that we were not being served like other towns or other cities or other barrios. Why was that not happening to us?

We were sensitive that we had paid dearly, World War II, World War I, the Korean War. We knew our men□well, mostly at that time, mostly our men because women were not as visible as they are now. They had died and they had come back and they had been wounded, and they weren't even allowed to died in a military cemetery. We knew our kids were dropping out. We knew that there wasn't resources in the community to start dealing with the poverty, and so those were things that really directly affected us because it could have been our parents, it could have been our cousins or our nephews. So it was close to hand. Not only was it close to family, but also to the ideals were there for us to address. It was a time, too, when the Civil Rights Movement had come. We had seen what had happened to African Americans struggle for justice, and we said we also should be fighting for our rights. We should also be just as strongly standing for what we believe is right, and so that impacted us. Then we also were the beneficiaries of the Civil Rights Movement, and we wanted to make sure we got our share of it just like everybody else. So we did take stands and we did pay dearly for it, some more than others. So it was a very challenging time. At the same time, it was very exhilarating. We were sensing our own empowerment. We were then realizing that, hey, if we're united, if we stand together, we can make things happen. I think that was an incredible unifying factor.

One of them, I'll tell you, which goes to the Chicano Moratorium, because I was a liaison between the Valley and East L.A., for the first time, tough guys that had gone to prison and had come back to prison were not battling each other, because they came to the conclusion that, "Hey, we're killing each other. We're brothers. The Man out there is getting us. Why should we now fight each other?" For a while, while that spirit of unity and the Chicano Moratorium, the Chicano Movement, there were less battles among gangs, because we and they work hand in hand. It doesn't mean that there wasn't at times crises, because there were, but as a whole, there was for the first time generations upon generations that hadn't talked to each other that were talking together. So it was a really exciting, painful, glorious, anguish, all the emotions you can think of, we experienced during that time.

ESPINO:

It also sounds like you had a victory with this after the burning building, that you weren't shut out, that it was handled differently. How do you feel about the way that the administration treated the students and the community after this?

00:22:0800:24:34

TOVAR:

The administration, I must say, I'm glad that they complied with it. They finally saw, first of all, that it was legit, that it was valid, that it was something for the common good, that it was part of their mission to include everybody. I think that was it. There was some leadership among the faculty, too, that was non-Latino, who also added to the support of our ideals.

So they brought in also a new president who was much more wiser, much more able to deal with the students, and who developed a good rapport with us in the community. That was a good part about it. I think that, in itself, they were very wise in choosing someone who could interact at a very, very crucial time. Because, remember, the crisis had occurred. Now was the healing. How that healing took place was also just as important and how we dealt with each other in addition to the implementation of those negotiations. So I was glad that it was dealt that way and wisely with that new president that came in. Interesting enough, the previous president (unclear) was not from the United States; he was Canadian. I had had experience with that president on another unrelated issue as a community person through some federal funds, but that's another story, very interesting story. But, anyway, I was pleased, and that was really what I call the quiet revolution. People say "revolution," right away they think□because I think education is a tool that is a true tool to break the chain of poverty. Think about it. Most of us in this event that I went a few days ago, most of us that were in that room, and it was packed with people, had been product of that era. It was packed with Chicanos and Chicanas that had gone to college, that prior to that all of our parents had been, as I told you, from farm workers to factory workers to construction workers. So we were the first generation, and we packed a whole room. We were celebrating, obviously, the holidays. That would not have happened, because we were all Valley people and we all went to the university, to CSUN. That in itself created a new middle class that would have not been there had there not been those courageous young men and women, because there were young Chicanas involved in that.

What was interesting was that the students themselves, those new students, did the outreach into the community and recruited students to come into the campus and to take advantage of the EOP program. They did hire Chicanos on the staff to man the program, but there was that serious commitment. "We have now taken the stand. Now how are we going to deliver to our community?" So they literally went door to door and they went to schools and they announced how they could get grants for the EOP program, how they could enroll. So it was a revolution, a change, that it's very stabilizing. Now from those groups you have principals, you have administrators, you have members of the Board of Education. One of them is a member of the Board of Education that went to CSUN. You have attorneys. We have different professions that came out of that era, the product of that era. I'm concerned now because it seems like the status of public higher education is at risk, and as a matter of fact, the funds will not enable students to enroll because now they have a limited enrollment because of the budget cuts. The ones that I'm concerned about that will be left out are the ones that we originally meant this to impact their lives, the lowest-income student who has the abilities or potential abilities and will be left out of the process. We're going backwards, I feel. I've always been an optimist in saying that there's always a way, but I don't know, this is the biggest challenge, I think, even than then, because the funds were available, but the resistance was within the system. Now the system doesn't have it and the money's not there for us to implement those programs.

ESPINO:

But the departments exist.

00:26:40

TOVAR:

They exist, but□ ESPION: And classes and books and□

TOVAR:

Yes, all that. I often quote, along with many of us of my generation, I have a paperback that says exactly 25 cents, another for 75 cents, and I keep it there as a reminder to my young nephews. Value your education. In my times, it was very difficult for me because 25 cents was 25 cents then. It was a lot of money. But now a paperback can be $100. I was shocked one day I went to the bookstore, a paperback, my god, what paper did they use? Did they put gold in it or something? But it's serious. I kid about it, but it's very serious because it's a

great threat to especially our community.

ESPINO:

Let me ask you about Dr. Rudy Acuña. I recall that he was interested in obtaining the job just in the regular History Department and that that was the idea of do you want to be separate, Chicano Studies, or do you want to have Chicano Studies within main departments? Do you remember that debate occurring?

00:28:1800:31:0500:33:12

TOVAR:

Well, I'll tell you. I was a history major, and there was only one professor that was Chicano. They didn't call it at that time Chicano, Mexican American, and that was Dr. Julian Nava. He taught Latin American history. Other than that, there were no other professors in any department. I was in the liberal arts and social science, and there weren't any. There was no image there that I could identify with.

The tragedy of that being having started off as a history major is that the reason that we have Chicano Studies was because the history of the United States has excluded the role that Mexican Americans have played and now Latin Americans are playing in its history. We can go to Florida, we can go to the parts of the world where Latinos are coming in, and they are playing formative roles in the history of this country. So, unfortunately, we even now are having Central American History Department and all that kind of stuff. I know that it would have been very difficult for Rudy, even though he had the credentials, for him to have been integrated into a regular history class, and it was difficult. I cannot tell you that I know all the details of it, but I do know from the point of view of the community that we felt that there was no other option, that the resistance was even great, having been that we had won a certain amount of victory in the sense of a Chicano Studies Department, the EOP program, and the development of a Chicano Community Center, which later on I played a role in. I became the director of the Chicano Community Center, and I was the liaison between the campus and the Chicano community at that time. As a matter of fact, it was housed in the corner of Laurel Canyon and San Fernando Mission Boulevard, the house that was the liaison. But it's, again, the same thing that African Americans went through. Remember, African Americans were told they didn't have a history, and we, in turn, were just completely neglected. I think that it was too bad because it excluded all other students. In order for us to be understood as Chicanos, Latinos, the so-called dominant group also has to understand that that history is also theirs. It's not just our history; it's their history. This is the United States of America, and whatever happens within the country, within those fifty states, and whoever plays a role in the history of those fifty states, it is part of all Americans' history, not all separated, over here Chicano Studies and over here so-called American history. So for that purpose I really think that it's a tragedy.

I do believe that the Chicano Studies Department and other ethnic groups does play a role in sensitizing and educating. I want to use the word "educate," because sometimes we only think about it well, we're giving kids the function or the role of feeling good about who they are. Well, Chicano Studies does more than that, from my point of view. Not only does it get you to know your own history in the Southwest as Americans, but also, too, it does give you pride in who you are, which in high school you never got taught what is being taught at the Chicano Studies Department. I was fortunate because I had a father who was a history buff and who knew Mexican history. He lived it. He didn't have to read about it, even though he read a lot about it. So I knew my history before I even entered□at least part of it as a young girl. But a lot of our young people didn't. Especially there were second generation, quite the opposite. Their fathers and mothers didn't want them to be hurt like they were, and so they would tell them, "Forget the language. Forget. Be an American." To be an American meant you spoke only English, that you didn't admit to your own identity. At least, that's a very important role that the Chicano Studies plays, in addition to learning your history. The tragedy of it is that we're not teaching everybody what the history of the Southwest was, and the history of the Southwest cannot eliminate if it's honest and ethical the role of the Mexican American and other ethnic groups that have come and played a role. We accept the Chinese history and the role of the Chinese in the railroad, but I'm sure they did more than the railroad, and other groups, but in order for the Latino and the Mexican American to be understood by the dominant group, they have to know so-called our history, which is really their history, too, the irony of it all.

But that was the questions that were being dealt with, and Rudy did want to integrate, as I remember. He's played an excellent role in being really the great scholar of Chicano Studies and portraying its history and now fighting against□you see, when we talk about going backwards, my concern about how higher education because of the cutbacks in enrollment might affect us. So, too, there's those that don't even want that studies again, and they're fighting against it in Arizona and other southern states, even. So we appear like we're going backwards, but that's what that means, that we have to reinforce ourselves again and not let that happen. Hopefully, we'll learn from the experiences, the pains that we went through, the confrontations, and maybe we can come to some decent compromise on this, because I would not want us to have to battle it like we did in the mid sixties and the early seventies.

ESPINO:

How was the struggle with the African American contingent? Did you negotiate together or was it separate?

00:35:0500:37:4200:39:13

TOVAR:

Since I was not part of those negotiations, this is what I know. I'm sure there's some things that happened that I'm not aware of. But I understood that they were united in the initial negotiations. Rudy might be able better to portray that, or even the young man who was the chairman of the MECHA Committee, he might be able he's now an attorney, by the way.

One of the things that I do recall is that there was later on a difference, and the knowledge of the difference I'm aware of was when the Native Americans wanted also to be part of the EOP program. What happened there is that before that the slots were evenly divided. What happened is the administration reserved X amount of slots for new enrollment, and so they just did fifty-fifty, fifty for African Americans, fifty for Chicanos. When the Native Americans came in to request that they be included on the EOP program, the administration was not willing to for whatever, probably budgetary, annual commitment, was not willing to give them more slots, which I wish they had. So, instead, what happened is that the administration approached the Chicano students and the African American in the EOP program and said, "Okay, you guys, you've got to give some of your slots to the Native Americans." African Americans refused to give any slots away, so Chicanos did give slots to create the Native American History. So that created a tension situation, because they felt, "Hey, why is it that we can't each of us," whatever number it was. I can't even honestly remember right now. Somehow seventy-six stands out, but I'm not sure whether that was the number of slots. "Why can't we each give?" Because it was a smaller group, so maybe each of them could have given ten or whatever was equitable, but that did not happen. That sort of created a little tension on that. There were differences, but I very honestly can't remember all of them now, because my role, by the way, I went in there as a community person who was active in my own program, to play the role of helping the students and the administration finish all these negotiations. However, the students were looking for a director for the Community Outreach Program, and I was very flattered when they wanted me to be that director, because I already had a job. But I felt at that time that this was such an important time and that I hoped that I would play a role that would be helpful, and I accepted that position.

So for three years I was the liaison between the CSUN itself and the community. Believe it or not, that was an important role because, as I told you before, I met with parents. I tried to ease the parents to know why their daughters' studies were the way they were, why they had to live at the dorm, some of them that lived out of the area, and in it we worked with the Chicano Studies Department, the EOP program, to have an Open House for parents and invite the parents so that they would know what college life was like. In addition to that, go to the homes of the parents, many of the parents, especially for young girls, and tell them what college was life and to make the life a little bit easier for some of these young Chicanas who for the first time were going to be away from home. There was a cultural clash there and tradition, a different kind of role that was happening. So I did play that role. However, I'm so sorry that once I left it, they didn't renew it, because we're still facing the same things. That's one of the things about our community. We think we've reached everybody, but the inflow of new people coming in with a first generation, that's still there. Some of those values still have to be modified so they best reflect the times.

So it's too bad, but I now see the role of those students that graduated from there that are now teachers, principals, working with those parents to getting them prepared for college. So that, in itself, was that quiet revolution I'm talking about, and hopefully it won't be threatened as much as I seem it's going in that direction.

ESPINO:

Were you able to participate in the hiring of the staff of Chicano Studies?

TOVAR:

Yes, I did.

ESPINO:

Can you talk to me about that experience and that process?

TOVAR:

Yes. What it was, I wasn't the only one. Again, with that committee, Mrs. Ramirez was also very key, and Lou Garcia and some other people. What we did is that the department, the Chicano Studies Department, would bring some candidates that had applied. We didn't have a role in getting the applications or making the announcements. What we did is that our role was to get the applications, review them, interview those teachers that were interested in becoming part of the Chicano Studies Department, and then give our recommendation. Basically what we had recommended was usually honored, and also, too, because we had the input of Rudy and some other professors that were there. So we did play a role. It was very interesting, because it was the first time, and I think the first time anywhere, that we were going through that experience, community people were playing a role in who would be in the Chicano Studies Department. We brought in people from Michigan. We brought in Latinos, that were all over. That was another education that we received. That's how the composition of the department came. Now, obviously, we don't play that role anymore.

00:41:09

ESPINO:

Do you remember any specific names?

TOVAR:

The ones that I can think of right now at the top of my head is Perez Lopez (phonetic), Perez Lopez, and then the other one was with an R.

ESPINO:

(unclear), no?

TOVAR:

No.

ESPINO:

(unclear)?

TOVAR:

No. Way back, that's even way before that. He was a brother. He had been a brother, and he had a very□Gerald Resendez. My goodness, Gerald Resendez, one of the originals. And Perez Sandoval was another one that he had been originally a Spanish-speaking teacher and had been active in LACA, as a matter of fact. We, LACA, was very fortunate in having some of the early Chicanos that had a very strong education background, had a very good reputation, were very stable people and knew who they were, knew their profession and their love for students. They loved being teachers, so they fitted really very good as pioneer teachers. Carlos Arce was another one that I remember as being one of the originals. Carlos now, I believe, is in Michigan. I'm not too sure. I haven't followed all their scholarly accomplishments. But we had quite a few. It just reminds me that's been quite a while, and I see their faces but I have to struggle with their names. But, anyway, it was a very exciting□the other thing, too, is that we also interviewed some of the students that were coming into the EOP program because we had X amount of slots, and we had so many applications. Again, we were sensitive to the need, and we did do some interviews, some of the staffing. So it was a very interesting era that we belonged to.

00:43:15

ESPINO:

Do you remember what you were interested in as far as the hiring of a candidate, what you were looking for? Sounds like they were all men.

TOVAR:

You know what? The tragedy of it was that we, if I recall correctly, we didn't have any females. Even one or two, because there was a part, remember, we recommended. We didn't do the final hiring. There was always some reason from my point of view, and this is my own private feeling, that it wasn't then the era of being inclusive. It was tragic because this was the golden opportunity where there was really no rules as to why they couldn't be more involved. There wasn't any reason. Again, a movement, bless the heart of a movement. (Interruption)

ESPINO:

We're back and probably the vacuum cleaner is really loud so maybe we should finish up this thought and then we will continue next time.

TOVAR:

Yes. I'm sorry.

ESPINO:

That's okay.

TOVAR:

Well, the Chicanas didn't really come into play originally, the original faculty, and it was not until much later, and I really honestly don't recall whether it was about a couple of years later that Anna Gomez came and she was our first female professor. That was so elating, and especially for our young Chicanas.

ESPINO:

You know, I'm sorry to interrupt you. But this is so important, and I think the vacuum cleaner□maybe we should save that story for the next time.

TOVAR:

Okay, let's do that. Let's do that.

ESPINO:

I think she's going to appear in the video back there. Let me stop it here.

TOVAR:

Okay. (End of December 15, 2011 interview)

SESSION SIX (December 20, 2011)

00:00:08

ESPINO:

This is Virginia Espino, and today is December 20th. I'm interviewing Irene Tovar at her home in Mission Hills.

We're just going to pick up from where we left off last time, and then we can go back and forth with what we were talking about before we started recording regarding your work with Jerry Brown and the conference, but I wanted to follow up with the important role that you played as a community member in the hiring of some Chicano faculty members. You mentioned last time that that was unheard of, that actually community people were involved in the hiring process. That was huge, a tremendous change, not just for Chicanos but in the whole university system for that to happen is incredible. So can you talk to me about your experience with hiring of Anna Nieto Gomez? She's such an important historical figure and controversial, especially at CSUN when you think about her leaving and what she argues happened. What can you tell me about her?

00:01:3900:03:4400:05:57

TOVAR:

One of the things that happened that the community did play a direct role initially at the beginning of the initiation of the first Chicano Studies Department at CSUN was that a committee was formed. A committee was formed so that the community could have an impact on what type of faculty we wanted at the Chicano Studies Department. Not only that, but also, too, who should be the staff at the EOP program. We ended even interviewing some potential students that would be the first ones that went into the EOP program.

So the committee consisted of people like Lou Garcia, who had been very active in the community and had started the CYO, the Catholic Youth Organization, was very prominent leader in this area, in the northeast valley. Then there was a woman by the name of□we ended up calling her La Abuelita, because she was an older member, Lupe Ramirez. As a matter of fact, Mission College has a building named after her because of her strong advocacy for higher education for Latinos. She was one of those members and I was one of those members. Then we had some student representatives in that committee, and we were guided obviously by some of the new incoming staff. What we did is that we would look at the résumés, we would review them, we would interview them, and what was very important about that is that that potential faculty member had a real awareness of the importance of the community and what they did, so that they were not isolated in an ivory tower, as it was then called, because we felt the university□and I truly believe the university was out of face with the realities of what was happening surrounding them, otherwise we would never have had that confrontation and the ivory tower kind of stereotypes that we give to the universities at that time. So we did play a role in that selection, and we selected some very good people. I think I mentioned to you that Carlos Arce was one of them. He eventually left CSUN Chicano Studies and went to the University of Michigan, I believe. Then we had some other faculties, Resendez, Gerald Resendez, who also became one of the first faculty members and, of course, Rudy Acuña, that we're very proud of. So we did have an impact on that.

We also reviewed the applicants for the EOP program, and we did the same process. We interviewed and we did ask direct questions, and we were not limited to them in terms of why were they interested in being there, what was their background. Obviously, we went through their background, their experience, but also, too, what was their commitment. What were they dedicated to? That was very important. Did they also understand that one of our strongest philosophy was that when they graduated, when those students graduated, that they should have a commitment to come back into their community and help it. That was very, very important to us. It was a different times, you must remember that, and it had been very difficult for us. We didn't have elected officials in this valley that were Latinos or Mexican Americans or Chicanos. We had very few representation. I mean, in Congress I think the only one was Ed Roybal

that was there. In the City Council at that time we didn't have anybody. At the Assembly, I think we had maybe two; that was a lot. So it was a very different time as far as our power base was very limited in the formal political arena. So it was just we the community, whatever we did, whatever we organized, whatever we advocated, that was the only advocacy that there was to improve the socioeconomic condition of our communities. As you know, then we had very few college graduates, very few. Now it's true our population has increased, so it doesn't appear that there's that many percentagewise, but most of the people that are now professionals came out of that era, and we pushed and we went out and we made it known that there was opportunities for them to go to college. That was the other important role we played as community people in those committees. We then went to our respective communities and let it be known that they could apply. They could apply, and if they didn't have money, there was an EOP program.

So we also were that outreach, unofficial community outreach, for the university in terms of the recruitment effort. For many, many young people that had never, never thought of themselves as going to college, that was not part of our history, unfortunately. There were some that you knew, but that was so far and in between. But that gave a new awareness to our community that higher education was possible for them, public higher education was possible, and that there were even ways if they didn't have the money to apply for certain grants, loans, etc. Unknown. It was unknown to me during my era when I was a college student. I paid all my way through. I worked. I did all kinds of jobs, but that was a known factor within our community. We worked with churches. We worked with social service organizations. We worked with the schools. At that time, remember, too, we didn't have hardly any Chicano Latino teachers, so we were dealing with what we may now take for granted, that we go to a school and you're likely to meet not one or two or three, we even might meet the principal who's Latino or Latina, and that didn't exist then.

ESPINO:

You were starting from zero.

TOVAR:

From zero. So all this now that you see was a result of that era, was a direct result of that era. Out of that, too, came the aspiration that you could also run for offices, so a lot of things set the tone for what is now here. The tragedy is that it may be changing because of where we are right now in the socioeconomic status of our country in 2011.

00:08:00

ESPINO:

Let me go back to something you said about asking or trying to decipher their commitment and their dedication. Why was that important at that time?

00:10:09

TOVAR:

Well, first of all, this was the first time it was being done. We had had experience in the past, and that's part of the result of discrimination we had encountered. Yes, there was some Latinos who were in positions, very few but they were there. But the way they got there was by denying who they were and not appearing too pro our community, and if they did, they had to do it in a very subtle way, like almost hidden, like it was terrible to try and help people who were in need that you in your position should be helping. So we wanted to counteract that. We wanted to create a new generation of Chicano Latinos who did know who they were and were proud of who they were. Not arrogant, but proud of who they were and were not ashamed to admit it. Such a simple thing, which meant gaining back your identity, gaining back yourself, your self-image, because your culture is part of your identity. It leaves a mark in your personality. So we wanted to change that. We wanted to create that new Chicana/Chicano Latino who knew who he was or who she was, who was not ashamed of who he or she was, and who was willing to serve in whatever position they took and look at the needs of that population. We were not talking about preference. We were talking about just meeting the needs. Whoever you are, whatever ancestral you have, whatever profession you get in, what you do is what you typically should do. You look at what your mission is, where the need is the greatest, and what you can do to deal with those needs. So whoever you are, let's say you are a Chicana and if you're in a position that can better your profession in terms of the needs, what are you going to do? You're going to look where the needs are greatest, how I can do to do programs that will enhance that community. So it doesn't matter what color they are.

It's unfortunate in most of the situations if you're dealing with programs that are upwardly mobile or that you're trying to improve the socioeconomic community, our community always comes out as one in the greatest needs. So we were trying to do that. We were trying

to create that new person that had that identity, that had that pride, that was not ashamed of their language, of their culture, and that also they felt that they are Americans. They are Americans. That was very key, that Americans came in all colors and all religions and in all cultures, and to accept themselves as part of that fiber. At the same time, we were also working to trying to educate the university about that new person and why we wanted that new person like it was.

ESPINO:

Do you remember then your first meeting with Anna Nieto Gomez when you're looking at like this new person that's emerging, young and with these values that you just talked about?

00:11:4900:14:31

TOVAR:

Because we had two women that felt very, very important about the role of the woman, which was Mrs. Ramirez and myself, we were so pleased when we heard that there was a candidate who was applying for the position. I don't remember all the details, but I do remember the effect and the pride that I felt when Anna sat right opposite of us and told us about her credentials and her ability.

We wanted the guys to know, too, that we were supporting her. We knew, unfortunately, or we sensed□maybe that's a better word□that it was not going to be easy, because she was the first one. But we felt that her personality, her strength was going to make her survive her being the first one there. That, I think, was kudos to her, her knowledge, her skill, and that had an absolutely effect on the Chicanas. Partly I could see it reflected in the service I did as a director of the Chicano Outreach, of the Community Center. I was their director, and I could sense it in the girls that I did talk to or they came to me and brought up their issues and their problems, because there were Chicanas going on now to higher education, and it was another culture clash. I think Anna, whether she knows it or not, or whether we even understood it that well, did have that impact on the Chicanas, because here they were able to go to a woman in the department, and they could see that here was a competent woman who knew her subject, who had self-pride in who she was, and she was a feminist. That, I think was very uplifting in the classroom situation and even outside of that. My role was not in the classroom situation. Mine was outside, trying to connect the university with the community, and that's where I would see the effects of her on it. So we were very pleased when she came. We wanted to let it be known. But at that time, Virginia, it was not that supportive of the Chicanas in the Chicano Studies Department toward women. For some it might have, and I can't say it might have been that they truly didn't, were hostile toward women, I can't say that, but it might have been indirectly. But the effects was not that they encouraged it that much. It wasn't because some of them were mean people, anti-women, but I think they misrepresented or misunderstood□maybe that's a better word□misunderstood our culture, our own culture. Because if you're a historian, a true historian and a true researcher, you have to be aware of the role that women, Latinas, have played in our whole history in the Latino world.

Our first poet woman was Santa Inez in terms of her role that she played, and many other women, nuestras Adelitas that we romanticized. But really their lives were very hard. We romanticize them, but they were tough ladies. They went right into the war, right in the front lines. I mean, on the front lines, and sometimes even with their children. (Interruption)

ESPINO:

Okay. We're back.

00:16:25

TOVAR:

Right. One of the things that I think we didn't take full opportunity of, and probably because we had never gone through that route, since it was a new thing, Chicano Studies, that was historical, it was being created, we were not yet completely obligated□and that's not a good word□to meet the traditional standards of being a professor. So there was a lot of creativity that we could have had. You didn't have to have a Ph.D. We even got some people who had B.A.'s, but it was an era because there never had been someone who was teaching Chicano Studies. So we could have, had I thought of it, which I didn't, we could have probably got some women, more women in at the beginning. In retrospect, that's what I now look at. I don't know. We could have created new titles, because that's how open it had been left to us. We could have even done career development things so that they could have been teaching.

I'm not an expert in terms of title, but at that time it appeared very open for new ways of looking at teaching because it was a new department. So maybe we could have developed new assistant professor or something like that so that it would develop that. It took a

little bit longer for that to happen, and now I understand, according to Rudy, that more than half of the faculty at CSUN are women. So what a change, right? That's also, too, why then I want to acknowledge the Chicanos and that also saw the light and realized that they had to.

ESPINO:

Were you a part of her leaving CSUN?

TOVAR:

No.

ESPINO:

You were no longer there?

TOVAR:

I was no longer there, so I was not part of that. So I just heard of it. I was not in any way by then. I left the university in 1971 because that was when finally the monies that were allocated for the Chicano Center had expired. I was the first and only Chicano Community Center director. It was that outreach that we played.

ESPINO:

Can you tell me then a little bit more about the climate of the time or the culture of the time and□we didn't talk about it before□how you came to identify yourself as Chicana? Did you consider yourself Chicana in the same way that, say, Anna Nieto Gomez did, or did you have a different understanding of your identity at the time?

00:18:4400:20:4700:22:56

TOVAR:

Remember I have lived through different phases of our identity. I don't know if you recall that when the organization□I was one of the cofounders, the Latin American Civic Association, I identified myself as a Mexican American because that was the equivalence of what it would have been at the time. Are you a Mexican American or a Chicana? Chicana was the name you didn't want to use, right?

Because of my parents I've always□and maybe that's an advantage I've had, because since I was a very little girl I was always taught to be proud of who I was. So my identity, I think, was in place. That I saw the surroundings about me that were anti-Mexican American, I think as a young girl I sensed it. Maybe I couldn't define it, but I know that there was that hostility, not only because of what my parents had taught me through history but also, too, because I experienced it as a young woman in the public school system. But I used the word "Mexican American" in the sense, and then I did the transition not neglecting or ignoring Mexican American, but acknowledging myself that I was a Mexican American who now took the title of "Chicana." In a way, I don't know whether to say defiance to the system, to me the word "Chicana" meant I'm a Mexican American born in this country, and I am an assertive, an advocate for the role of my community. That was how I was defining myself at that time, that I was not going to stand back knowing what were those discrimination practices and let it happen, since I had every right, every right that every other fellow Americans had. So I was identifying myself as a Chicana who was an advocate for our community, but very assertive that I was an American, which meant that I had the rights that every other American had. It was an issue of my rights that I was fighting for and an issue that I should not be denied those rights. When I say me, I mean we as a group.

I can't tell you precisely how I remember her advocating, defining herself, but I know she did have a sense of pride of being a woman, which I also had. Definitely, without doubt in my eyes, she was a strong advocate and that she had a lot of pride for who she was and that she was a competent, able woman, which I think we could see that and we were proud of that. She was articulate. She was not going to let anybody take advantage of her, which was another good thing. Because one of the things that happens when you don't have that self-image, positive image, you sometimes take abuse and you accept it. That's what we were trying to teach our young ladies, that they didn't have to take those abuses, that they didn't have to deny themselves their desires, their wants, whatever they wanted. When I worked with the Community Center when I saw so many young Chicanas, it was very sad because here were these very bright young women, and yet you could even see in their body language that they weren't proud of who they were. Some of them were not only beautiful inside but beautiful outside, and you would think the way they put their shoulders and how they looked or how they spoke that they didn't think too much of themselves. So we had to work to building that confidence in them. That was what I felt was my role in the part, to have them faith in themselves, to look and have pride and to know that they could do it, that it was not impossible, and also to be fair with them, to tell them it's going to take work on their part also to accomplish that, that it was not going to be easy but that they had the strength within them to overcome it.

That was difficult because of years and years of being felt the opposite of that. They were going to take a change in how they saw themselves, how they acted, how they did their work. I think the product has been shown that they did do it, because now you have teachers, administrators, attorneys, all kinds of professions that our young women have gone into.

ESPINO:

What do you think were the best strategies for that? Was it feminism, nationalism, psychology? What do you think worked the best for this young group of□

TOVAR:

When you first asked the question I was going to say all of the above. Then when you said□what was the last part that you said?

ESPINO:

Psychology?

00:24:5900:26:4400:28:4900:31:03

TOVAR:

Psychology, no. I think it was all as far as what was the best one, to choose which one was one of the best, I think at that time, you see, you had to understand something about human behavior, too, because some of them you had to almost look at each of them individually, in terms of how psychologically you were going to touch that life. So part of it was you having some sense of human behavior, but the other one was what was going to work for this young woman and young man, because we also worked with our men. We were not just a center for Chicanas. We had to work with our young men too. We had to then sense what was the strength and weakness of this young person. What was their family history? How was that house? Was there a strong father? Was there a weak mother? Was there a combination of both? Or was that a child who had just had one parent?

We met a lot of tragedies. We met tragedies from almost near-orphans, some who were in foster homes. So we had to be generalized. But as a general rule, I think that era was one in which we were starting to feel pride with who we were, so we emphasized their own identity, which if you want to, you could call it nationalism in terms of their own identity. I'm a Mexican American. I'm a Chicana. But also, too, I think we had to deal with that they were Americans and they had rights. I think for some that was very, very important. "You mean I have this right?" "Yes, you do." "You mean I've been deprived of it or that that's what happened when they did this to me?" "Yes, that is it." That impacted some of our young people, and it was tragedy to know that they didn't know that they had those rights. That meant someone was failing them. Someone in the educational system had failed them in letting them know, "You are an American. You do have these rights, and therefore you have the right to it, whatever it is that you were being denied on." I think that worked for many of them in terms of it. Then their love for their parents. I know that one of the things that motivated me very strongly in terms of never denying who I was my parents. They were Mexicans. They were loving. They were caring. They were concerned for my education. They sacrificed everything they could for us to succeed in our family. So how could I deny them?

My mother was very clear about it. My mother I remember saying, "If you deny you're a Mexican, you're denying your parents." That struck me very strongly because I loved my parents. They were wonderful parents. They sacrificed so much. So, to me, that was it. To some kids that rang a bell. I would say that one of the things that impressed me and was very touching was their love for their parents, that and when they succeeded in doing something, they would always recognize their parents. I thought that was very important. The stability of a home is based on how you see your parents. For others, it was them being recognizing that they were Americans, that they had rights, acknowledging their ancestors, their pride in who they were, and also finally believing that they were capable of accomplishing a higher education. "I can do it." I mean, it seems so simplistic now. But to believe in yourself that you could do it was another element that played a role. So it was never one or the other. I think it was a combination of those because they had never had any of those emphasized to them. I think that's where success happened. With Chicanas, it was a little bit more challenging, because the young men, obviously, at that time the culture of that time was, "Hey, you're a guy. You can do it. What? You want to stay in the dorms and not come home for the weekend?" I never, never had a single male student that came up to me and said, "My parents are questioning why I'm staying at the dorms. Or what am I doing in the dorms?" Never. Not one. I don't think I'm unique in that experience.

But at the same time, opposite of that, I had very trying, challenging experience with our women, our young Chicanas who were having trouble at home with their father. Interesting enough, not with their mother, for the vast majority. It was their father who was a strong man in that household and who determined what did happen or didn't happen, and they were not very pleased that their daughter was going to be staying in a dorm away from the house, not having the father's protection. What would happen to them? They would get pregnant. Excuse me, but even some of the girls who came crying to me, "My dad thinks I'm a prostitute." Think about it. These young seventeen-year-old, eighteen-year-old girls, being crushed by being offended with the men. She loved her father. So we had to work that out. We had to work with her. I made home visits to the fathers and the family, and usually in those experience it was the father who was really the spokesperson. The woman, the mother, usually was very quiet and just listened. You could sort of sense that there wasn't necessarily agreement, but she would never, I guess, defy him or so-call put him in an awkward position so it looked like. The times that I was able to persuade the father, it took some time. It took some work. Then they made me responsible for whatever happened to their daughter, and that was so□when they finally gave in, they said, "Well, if anything happens to her, I will hold you responsible." That was a very serious thing. I took it very, very seriously. That initiated, I think, a lot of other things that not only I saw but others, other people in the Chicano Studies, let's say, units, because I include the EOP program, started thinking that we should expose our parents to what college life was like, because it was a change.

ESPINO:

It is true that these kids are eighteen, nineteen, and they're human beings, and they are going to be attracted to each other, and they are going to want to engage in relationships. How did you handle that aspect? Was that something that you felt you had to intervene in, their personal□

TOVAR:

If I had brought that subject up with some of those parents, I would have lost that girl, because the thing was that the father said, "You are coming home. You're not going to go further on in your education." So even though I would have wanted to talk about those subjects, I would have turned that father off so fast, and I would have lost that young lady. So some of the things I had to sort of hold back and then see how I could work it out in a very subtle way. But, remember, even then, even though we had had the Flower Children era, it had not touched our community that much, not hardly, so that even though the Flower Children were much more sexually aware and much more free with that, it hadn't yet impacted that dramatically our□and obviously, it happened, right, because as you said these are young people, their hormones are working.

ESPINO:

There were no cases where you felt you had to really get involved in discussing sexuality and reproductive choice□

TOVAR:

I never had, not that detail.

00:32:32

ESPINO:

□or responsibilities or that kind of thing?

00:35:15

TOVAR:

First of all, that was not the role so-called of the director of the Chicano Community Center. Secondly, I don't think we were yet in that era that started talking like you said about that. So we were aware. Obviously, we were aware, but in order for us to keep the young people, the young women, we had to□not ignore it, but when we did, it had to be on a one-to-one with that young lady, very confidential, so that she would have to be so-called the change agent. We would just sort of be the advisors, if you want to put it that way, and so then deal with it. We would be there to give her a counseling personally, confidential but not on sort of like a group situation. But bear in mind something very important. It wasn't the theme of the times. Let me put it that way. It wasn't yet as open discussed as it is now. I mean, for those that didn't live that time, and now we know the times of today, it was very different. It was very, very different. But the most important thing is we wanted to keep that young lady in college. That was the most important thing. We were not going to be dishonest about her needs or honest about it. We were going to be realistic about keeping her and what we had to do with respecting that parent, even if we differ with him or her. I don't think I ever had to do that with a mother. It was always with a father. But, interesting enough, the father, in his ways that sometimes we don't understand, did love their girl and did come to the Open House that we had. They came and visited the dorms. At that time we only had dorms for the girls and we had dorms for young men. It wasn't like we now have. So that was also different, a change. Later on came the integration of both, that young men and young women could be in the same dorms. I think that in a way in order for us to transition, it had to happen this way. Because by then we had a new generation, a second generation of college students and whose parents knew a little bit more about what college life was, and maybe even softening themselves with the issue of sexuality in terms of it, understanding it.

The other thing is that some parents were concerned about the male faculty. That was another concern. The young girls were very impressed with these, oh, this professor out there in front. So they were also concerned about that in terms of it. So that also became an issue that we had to work with in a very sensitive way.

ESPINO:

Sounds like there's just a tremendous amount that you have to deal with when you're dealing with bringing young female students onto a university campus.

00:37:1100:39:31

TOVAR:

Oh, absolutely. I think now if I would be in the same position, it would be much, much different, and maybe, maybe much a little bit easier. Because, now, first of all, you have much more Chicana, not only as students, but also, too, in the faculty and in the staff. When you go to the Personnel Office or you go to the Loan Department, I mean, there's a Latino or a Latina there, and it's a different world, completely different world. That world at that time, you were not meeting anybody who looked like you on the other side, so it was very different. Now the times are different, the values have changed, the information has come up much more clearer. Even our Spanish-speaking media is more open to discussions on sex. The radio stations, if you really, really listen to some of the radio stations, my god, they're very frank about it. On TV, if you look at Spanish-speaking television, as a matter of fact, some of it goes a little bit, in my opinion, the kids are still awake, and some of those programs should be on later on. But, anyway, that's something different.

So it is challenging, and we need people who need to understand young women, Latinas, Chicanas, that are now going into the university where they had never been before, where it's a first generation. That's why I'm so committed that we got to work more in programming for first-generation students. I was a first generation. Credits? What? Matriculation? What's that word? I couldn't even pronounce it. I mean, it was a new world, new language, new life, new activities, new behavior. So it hits that young lady very strong, especially if she very much has a strong father image or has a hostile father, because some fathers may be strong but they're not hostile. Also, too, then how she grows up perceiving men, that's another element, and do you talk about that? In today's era, we do talk about that more often. How you perceive men may determine how you choose your partner, and I think in the college life that would be probably very appropriate because you're going out there for the first time, you're having more freedom than you've ever had in your life, you're on your own, so how do you make wise decisions? So it is challenging. But I think it's very gratifying when you see that young woman that walks into your office physically showing her body, how she feels about herself, her tendency to□well, you can tell it in how she walks.

Then when you see that young woman graduating, oh, my god, it's so fulfilling. There's nothing so good as feeling that, god, you impacted this young lady, now she feels good about herself, she knows she has talent, she knows she has abilities. In a way, too, you feel, the same way, too, about our young men, too, because they have the same problem, not equally to a Chicana, but definitely he also has his own challenges.

ESPINO:

Let's talk about, then, retention, because that's the flipside. So once you get them in□well, you get them in, that's the struggle, the first struggle. But then keeping them there, because what the statistics are, and I don't know what they were at that time, but many don't finish college.

00:41:28

TOVAR:

That's the other sad thing about it. Many of those issues also have to do with the economics. We'll start off with the economics because there's other issues besides that. I'll talk to you about what I experienced. What I experienced is that there were some students who got loans and grants and because their family was in such great need, they used that money to help their family. So then they had to go out and work, and that meant that they took away time from their studies, which they needed, especially since they were first generation and had to develop other skills, language, vocabulary, strength, other things that they needed just to start off with. So that complicated things for them. So one was the economics. Two was also, too, that they had to go out and get another job to supplement, because they loved their families and they ended up giving their money to the families. Then that took time away from their studies, which their needed more perhaps than the average student. That's where those support programs are so important. So that, in itself, made it difficult for them to stay, and eventually became so difficult that they had to because it affected also, too, their grades. Eventually they had to leave there either because they knew that they couldn't continue on or, too, the university said, "Hey, you're not meeting your grade standards. You've been in probation, etc."

So that's why those support groups are so important, and that's why those students have to be followed up a little bit more closely. That's where counseling becomes such an important part, I feel, of the program, of the services to those students. That dean of student affairs is a very key guy, how she or he's committed to serving students, and does he or she understand the first-generation student. Especially if they're low income, how do you□because I have met first-generation students who were well-off middle class, but not because their parents had gone to college but maybe they were a grocery owner, a store owner, a little shop, so the father's business had been good, so they had□you know. But they were first generation and yet they were not acquainted with the college world. So those are the kind of things that you have to really follow up on those first generation. You cannot assume they can do it on their own. They do need that, and they have to know that that assistance is there, and they have to make sure that they feel comfortable coming to you in your role to get help. So it's challenging, but we've got to work very hard to retain them, especially right now. Now talking about fast forward, where it's not going to be that easy to get into the university and once you're there you want to make sure that they finish that college education.

ESPINO:

Do you remember the first graduation you attended of the Chicano students?

00:43:41

TOVAR:

Oh, yes, yes, I do. Oh, yes, I do. As a matter of fact, I remember because one of the graduates are Frank Del Olmo. Frank Del Olmo wore his brown beret, and we were so elated. There's nothing that□I don't know. It was just wonderful because that was the culmination of all the things that you had worked toward. That was D-Day.

I remember because they wore their brown berets instead of the regular cap, and what was so outstanding that time is that he graduated with the highest-point grade average. Not only that, but he won the Wolfson Scholarship, and that scholarship was not given every year. That was given at a time that you felt that there was an outstanding graduate, and he won it. To be Chicano and to be proud that he was, and to give that Chicano was□I still remember and I get goose pimples because it was such a beautiful, beautiful day. I remember it was sunny, it was beautiful, and I can almost close my eyes, and I can see him going up and getting his diploma. There was another young man by the name of Tim Timble (phonetic), who was a Chicano, but his father had been Anglo. But he was so Chicano. He was so proud of who he was. So it was a beautiful, beautiful day, and then to see in the audience, in the graduate audience□gee, my god, when I

graduated, I didn't see anybody like me at all. It was very, very thrilling. It was very touching. It was very emotional and it was a very happy day.

ESPINO:

He actually gave the power fist?

TOVAR:

He did. And, again, Virginia, I hope to get the pictures, because I took pictures of that, of that day, and it was really touching. He did. He did.

ESPINO:

Was that controversial too? I'm sure many Chicanos felt pride when seeing that. But what about the Anglo audience?

00:47:0000:48:11

TOVAR:

They didn't care. You see, that, I think, is the meaning of you knowing who you are. You had to, and you know what? Let me just tell you the way I feel about it. Whether we realize it or not, even to that hostile audience, it's for their own good too. It is. I'm serious about it. I'm not being cynical or anything. Because those that are not friendly, let's put it this way, not friendly, to other groups, and Chicanos, we're talking about, Mexican Americans, have also been dealt the wrong card. They have not been given the opportunity to understand the history that we've played in the United States, that we are part of the American history, and so they've been deprived of that. When you don't know and you hear those that do hate, and you don't hear a counter through your education, impartial, then you're likely to, if not join that element that is hateful, you'll have doubts or you'll have misgivings, or you'll be more judgmental on the negative.

So I think that is an injustice that we've done to the dominant group, and I really think that's where the educational system in the elementaries and the high schools have to start really teaching American history. We have not been teaching American history. We've been very selective in that history that we teach our children, so that the dominant-group child will feel, "Hey, this is my country". The minority child, like I was, another one, if it wasn't for my parents, we would feel like outsiders, like this is not our country. The bottom line is that we all are Americans, and for real. We've deprived the dominant group to understand that, and that has done more harm, whether they perceived it as such, as well as has both of us have lost in that process. So that, unfortunately, we had to create Chicano Studies and African American Studies and Native American Studies, when that should have been part of the American history, the American experience, as they say.

I don't regret that we have them. I strongly support the Chicano, the Ethnic Studies, if you want to put it that way. But it's how sad that not every American is going to go through that experience. Every now and then you see more and more non-Chicanos who are taking those studies, but it should be for everyone. It really should be, not as some accuse us of, that, "Oh, you're trying to push your department, your Chicano." No, no, it's for the welfare of all of us, all of us, and especially right now in this polarized country that we are in 2011. That would start beginning hopefully a better understanding among us as Americans. We praise other minorities who are noncolored, let me put it that, colored minority people, but we don't really accept the other Americans. That, I think, is what we need to work at.

ESPINO:

Last time we talked a bit about the anger of the time and the necessity of that just for experience. Did you have an experience with people who were anti-American? I mean, some of these young Chicanos were. They wanted to overthrow the system and create a new one, start from scratch.

00:50:3300:53:1500:55:1100:58:22

TOVAR:

Yes. Obviously that was part and parcel of the movement. It wasn't for everyone. Not everyone felt that way, but it was there. There's no denying about it. But you've got to understand this. If you have been deprived of your rights, and now you understand what your rights were, and you feel like something was stolen from you, unfairly, unjustly, some kids really hated that, that they had been denied something that was theirs. They did come out strongly in feeling that way. It was offensive to many, but I can understand that. I mean, I can understand that.

I never said that, but I was raised by my parents who told me that this was my country and that I was not someone had just been (Spanish phrase), as they would say. (Spanish phrase), in other words, and you don't come with hat in your hand. This was yours. So there's no reason for you□so I already had gone through that feeling. How can I say it? Because it really was not an overthrow. Mine was not one of overthrowing, but one of which it was that we had to change it. For whatever reason, I know it sounds kind of Pollyanna-ish, I read the Constitution because I was a history major. I read the Constitution in high school, and I truly was impressed with the words. I think that it had to do a lot, again, with my parents. So it had even a deeper meaning when I read the Constitution of the United States. I thought the goals, and maybe I didn't define them exactly that way, but the values were what was expressed as a young woman, I felt that that was beautiful, and if those were the goals of this country should apply to everyone. I think what helped me think that way was my parents and because of what they had gone through as young people where they had a revolution, had change, and I was never taught to romanticize revolutions per se, because not because of the ideals. The ideals you have to fight for. But that there was death and that people died and people were massacred because of what they believed. So if there was ways that we could protest and try to avoid the violence, that was very important. That's basically what my parents used, because they saw it, my dad especially who stayed in Mexico throughout the revolution. My mother came at the beginning of it. So my dad could describe sometimes to me what killings, the bodies, and all the things that happens when you start taking arms. So I believed in advocacy. I believed in standing up. I believed in what that Constitution of the United States said, that I had a right to grieve, that I had the right to speak up. Those were the things that I was trying to do.

But there were those young people who did, because they didn't see any hope that under the present system it would change. But I don't think, and I may be wrong, I don't think they saw what the whole consequences of that would be, what would happen. Not that I did, maybe, but they did espouse that. There was others who believed in Aztlan and that this was through our history, this was part of that, that we were here. We were integral. We were part of the fiber. I mean, how much more can one say than the fiber of it. You don't take the strings out of a fiber and separate them. We were an intricate part of it. So, yes, there was. Some of them eventually might have changed their position. Some of them might still believe in that, but there was that feeling. There's no denying there was. But it wasn't everybody. We came with different, I guess, views of what that Chicano Movement was like and what the feeling should be like and what should happen. But I think we got to understand these were young people. They felt something desperately taken away from them. I know I still meet some young men and women now, even older one, that felt bad because their language was taken away from them, and now they're desperately trying to gain it back and make sure that the children know it, and they're more Chicanos than any Chicanos I've ever met in my life. But because somewhere along the line they never knew they had that. Think about it.

It's serious when you feel that you had to deny what you were. That's a personality, a psychological impact on your life, how you see yourself, and unless you're bilingual and bicultural and live in this country, you may not understand the feeling nor how you feel when you discovered that part of you has never been accepted or existed and something was wrong with you. All of a sudden you see, "Nothing was wrong with me. I was okay. I'm proud of who I am." So that's very key. I don't think we really, really understand, deeply understand what impact that had. Here I have to thank Marcos de Leon again because he really made us understood the impact of being bicultural/bilingual, truly being it. It's not like I'm John Smith and now I'm learning Spanish, English, or another one. That's not the same thing as you being the cultural element in you, that you were raised with. It's a little bit different. So it really has impact, and it's too bad that now, again, we're visiting the same thing against all that hatred. This time it's even more open, more ugly, by people, as I said, gangsters with suits on, because they appear like very nice people and all of a sudden they open their mouth and they have all hatred in them, and it's so strong against Mexicans, and they say "Mexicans." Most dramatically, of course, the movement right now that is happening against Mexican. Then the LAPD just announced, I think less than a month ago, that hate crime has gone down, but hatred toward Mexican has gone up. Then I went through a redistricting hearings for the Board of Supervisors, and nice-looking people, what looked like law-abiding people, the minute they opened their mouth, all that came out was hatred. So you know that the times are coming back again to more openness, and that's where my gangsters with suits appear, because they really have hate in their hearts and their minds, and they're not ashamed, they're not ashamed to hide it. They say it openly before public agencies, before governmental agencies, before the state, the feds, and so we're aware of that. We're going to have to find out how we can combat it in a way hopefully that would not create more social unrest. But it's going to be very difficult because it's going to be difficult.

ESPINO:

You bring a really important point up, and that is, is it different than the late sixties, early seventies? Because it seems like at that time people were more careful with what they said in public.

TOVAR:

Absolutely.

ESPINO:

Like the gangsters in suits that you talk about of today, did he exist or she exist back then?

TOVAR:

I don't think they existed like they exist now. I mean, before that we were dealing with the institutions, the institutions whose systems were really against us. Now we're dealing with our fellow Americans, our fellow Americans, and they're not ashamed to say it. I've witnessed it. I still think about it and it's shocking and it makes me tremble, because it looks like the neighbor next door. It's not now the police. As a matter of fact, the police now are being more careful of how they deal with unrest. We saw the 99 People□

00:59:26

ESPINO:

Ninety-nine percent.

01:02:07

TOVAR:

□Movement. The police in Los Angeles, they did ensure that there was peace, but they handled them so much more carefully, versus the Chicano Movement where they came with batons and hit you indiscriminately. Now we're dealing with our fellow Americans, so this is going to be different. I see it as different. How we're going to deal with that may be even more harder because now we have even how do we deal with our fellow Americans that have the same rights as we do and that are claiming that they're doing under their constitutional right to say certain things that really create hate. I think that will call back on us working closer with our churches, with our interfaith groups that believe in working together. It will probably requirement more of government organizations, because there's Human Relations Commissions all over the state of California, nationwide. It's going to be a people-to-people sort of thing. But I think we got to raise the consciousness in the churches of what our moral rights are in this country. So it's going to require, I believe, a different kind of strategy for that. It's going to be like they say, quote, "changing the minds of people," educating them more, looking at our social values, our moral values. So it is going to be different. I haven't yet, to my knowledge, right now seen anybody who's trying to work toward that effort. I haven't yet. I'm not aware at least. Maybe there is, but I'm not aware of anyone is trying to sort of look at the dangerous things that is continued. Our hatred toward undocumented, we are not realizing that those undocumenteds, their crime is that they're poor. Their crime is that they are coming here to have a better future, and what immigrant has not done that and that they've even been willing to cross that hot desert and they've died in the desert, men and women and sometimes, unfortunately, children have died in the desert. We're not emphasizing that. We're not saying what sacrifice they're willing to do to have something better for their lives.

They're considered like if they were□they've killed a nation. They've raped. It's incredible. We use that with the excuse of terrorism. Well, that has been used for generations before there was such usage of terrorism that often. So how can we educate? How can we move their hearts so that they know these are people whose crime is to be poor and want something better? That's going to be a lot of work, because, oh, they're so, "Oh, but they violated the law." Yes, but by the words that they say, that creates hatred, that in itself to me is the moral crime. Even creating a hostile atmosphere where the Minutemen are there with guns, vigilantes, I mean, look what it's creating, violations of the law. We don't see that. We don't see the other name. So I hope we can work, a movement can start, when we can work with institutions that are community-based that will start working on that. Because it adds to the tensions that already exist in this country and in this world on hatred, religious hatred.

ESPINO:

This is the last question, and then I know you have to leave in a while. It's twelve-thirty. Is that okay, one more or do you want to stop?

TOVAR:

No, one more.

ESPINO:

Okay. This will be the last. That is, it seems like in the seventies and the late sixties, you had the Chicano Moratorium, the Anti-War Movement that unified all of these different groups like what you're saying doesn't exist today. Do you think that that was successful in bringing different people together? (Interruption)

ESPINO:

I'll just stop it, and then we'll just pick up the next time, okay?

TOVAR:

Okay. (End of December 20, 2011 interview)

SESSION SEVEN (January 31, 2012)

00:00:09

ESPINO:

This is Virginia Espino, and today is January 31st. I'm interviewing Irene Tovar at her home in Mission Hills.

We were having a great discussion before I turned on the recorder about your experience with the NAPP program and your first boss. Correct me if I'm wrong, but Opal Jones was your first boss?

TOVAR:

That's right. Well, my first real boss.

ESPINO:

Your first real boss?

00:01:49

TOVAR:

Yes, because I had worked prior to that with Congressman James Corman as a student, to pay my way through college. Then the Poverty Program came in 1965, and I was offered a job with the NAPP program. Now, the NAPP program was part of the War Against Poverty programs, and it created thirteen what was called outposts throughout the county of Los Angeles. One of them was in Pacoima, and I had been active in the community, so I was suggested as one of those directors, as outpost directors. Interestingly enough, I was a young woman and I had a lot of reservations whether I could run a program. I had been considered a very good organizer and that I could handle it, but I had never, never worked on having responsibility for other people. After I had interesting experience on how I was persuaded to do that, there was a man by the name of Dennis Vargas, who worked with the agency that distributed all the county poverty funds, he finally convinced me and I accepted the position. What it was, it was a program that worked right in the ghetto and in the barrios, right directly.

The philosophy of Opal Jones, who was my first boss, she was the overall director of this county program, was that you had to not only work in that community, you had to be living, almost work in the same conditions that your clients did. What it was, it was an effort to organize the very poor. That's where the grassroot people, and so that your staff became people from the community. Part of it was to do what was called that upward mobility programs. You hired them, you trained them, you then put them in social service agencies. You created the concept of the aide, which was then also very, very new in the schools, as I spoke to you about before. The teacher's aide, that was a controversial issues of that time. Then when you stay, for example, our role was to negotiate with social service agencies and see how they could hire these community people. We had done some training, but there we developed contracts with them so that then they could train them in whatever it is. So let's say they went to the Department of Social Services. They would be called social service aides, and they would train them and even eventually help them go to college. The role was they would eventually have steps to eventually become a social worker. So that was very innovative at that time. We were taking people right from poverty right in the community. Now, Opal Jones also believed that our conditions has to be comparable to that of the clients so that we understood what they went through. So I was housed in a housing project with no air conditioning. (Interruption)

00:03:57

ESPINO:

We're back on the video. I don't know if you remember what you were talking about but□

TOVAR:

I think I was saying the basic concept of the program that we developed.

ESPINO:

Yes.

TOVAR:

That we took people, grassroot people, low-income people, limited education or no education, people who were illiterate, and then we employed them. But then we as directors developed contracts with social service agencies, public and nonprofit, that would develop a career ladder. Those were the keywords, "career ladders," to make people mobile. What happened, those agencies would then train those people in their particular field and eventually even help them get a college education so, as the example I was giving, they could become□let's say they went to the Department of Social Service. They would eventually become social workers. That was, at that time, new careers, they were called. That was very dynamic part of the creation of the War Against Poverty.

ESPINO:

I'm sorry to interrupt. But earlier, before we were recording, you said something about Saul Alinsky. Does his philosophy come into play in this?

00:05:4700:07:58

TOVAR:

Oh, organizing what we learned. Because what I was giving you was the concept, and then I was going to try to tell you how we were trained. So that was the basic concept, okay? We organized communities. Now, how did we organize them? One of the roles of our director, Opal Jones, was to train the outpost directors, me and twelve others. So we were trained by Alinsky on how you organize the poor, how you develop leadership. It wasn't Irene Tovar who was leading the poor. It was the neighborhood, it was Juanita, it was Mrs. Jones, who was there, because his concept was that there's natural leadership among the poor.

We think that, oh, they're in disarray. There is an organization. We may not agree with it. It may not be the one that we would like to get, but how do we train low-income people to be empowered so that they know that even though they may have limitation in education and finances, etc., they had a skill of organizing, which would then empower them so they could go to the establishment and demand their needs, their rights. So that was part of it, just a real summary on what we were trained on Alinsky. We were trained those skills. We were the trainers of the poor, and we were not the front guys. We educated, we taught them skills of organization, and we got to know the community. We really had to be right there on the street. That was the excitement of the times, I mean, for us as people who felt, what is it, what my country can do for me and/or what I can do for my country, that kind of enthusiasm, energy that was felt during that era. So Alinsky was the one, our trainer. Then there were follow-up trainings. We met every Monday at Wrigley Fields, and it was interesting what we learned. She was an outstanding director and trainer and taught me things that I had never knew about how to do□I had been brought in a home that was very proud of who we were, but we were trained that, yes, you do ask for things, but we ask it very politely but very firmly. You don't give up. You persist in it. That's what I had been. But Opal Jones was opening our eyes that, "Hey, you've got to be aggressive. You've got to go out there and you tell that politician, "Hey, I don't care. This is what the needs of our community are." So that was very, oh, my god, I have to change my personality because□not so much change my personality but my method of how I deliver my concerns.

It didn't mean I was rude, because I never□and not that I was so fastidiosa that I was shunned by the four-letter words or so forth, but it wasn't my style, so it was my best style that I was very well informed. I was very cutting in what I was saying. I used the words that they understood, but they were very sharp and very firm. That also is another style that may not fully be appreciated by the establishment when you're an advocate, a strong advocate. But I don't regret it because it did help a lot of low-income people to eventually become involved. For example, let's take the Board of Education. Some of them eventually became the leaders that helped the Board of Education develop the Commission on Latino or Chicano Education, if you will remember that era. Many of those grassroot leadership came from Opal from the NAPP program.

ESPINO:

Do you have examples of that?

00:09:34

TOVAR:

Well, let's see. The one I remember, Natalia and I□forgive me, Natalia, I don't remember your last name now. But she was an excellent grassroot Latina Mexicana (Spanish phrase). But we taught them not to be shy, if they didn't know how to speak English, to say it in Spanish. Go before the Board of Education and say it in Spanish and make the system have people who learn who could communicate and know what you were saying. Those were incredible.

Now we take it for granted we have a translator in courts, in the Board of Education. We even have board members who speak Spanish. At that time, there was no minorities in the Board of Education. It was lily-white. So these things that now we take so much for granted was a real struggle to get it in. That's another thing that we learned from Alinsky. You state your position. You make the system then mold themselves or integrate what you are saying, and you don't back off, because you are moving for a cause for people who had been disenfranchised or had been discriminated. So it was really we were social change agent, and that was the excitement of it, that we felt we were making changes, that we were trying to make the system more open, that we were making it more democratic, more inclusive, less stereotype, less□at that time the word wasn't "racist." It was discrimination. It was other words, but it was□you know. So that's what I learned in the NAPP program.

ESPINO:

How did people come to you?

00:11:2700:13:4000:15:4600:17:41

TOVAR:

Well, because we reached out. That's a keyword. We did not wait for the people to come to us. We went out to the people. That's why we hired people from the neighborhood, because they knew the neighborhood and they knew who was a natural. When there was problems, if you really get down to neighborhoods, if you really study neighborhoods, grassroot poor neighborhoods or any neighborhood, you'll find out there's somebody that everybody goes to. The (Spanish phrase) this illness or that illness. Start looking at that lady. She must have some ability that people trust her, that people go to her.

You see, we define leadership sometimes very wrong. It's someone in a suit, someone who's very so-called very articulate, someone who's very presentable to the majority of our population. These were (Spanish phrase) who people would come knock at their door. They were as poor as anybody else, but everybody listened to her, and so we drew on those ladies. So we reached out, and then we sometimes would hire those ladies because they had the respect of the neighborhood. So it was a very good lesson for me. I was a very dedicated young woman, very committed to helping the poor. So I remember one time I call a meeting of grassroot community people, all basically mostly Spanish-speaking ladies, and I started talking to them about what I thought was very important in education. They sat very politely and listened to me and everything, and I thought□oh, and I especially wanted to speak Spanish so very well. I was a Spanish-speaker, but I wanted to make sure that they knew that I was very familiar with the language. Then at the end, after I had done all these charts and all these little fancy stuff, a lady says, "(Spanish)." Her concern was not the big picture that it was, but it was part of the big picture. What happened, what she was saying, "What I'm concerned about is that my child cannot cross the street from the elementary school because she will be run over by a car because there was no stop sign." So my first lesson was, what was their priorities? If their priorities was to put a stoplight that would cross into Norris (phonetic) Street, I remember, from Pacoima Elementary so kids would not be runned over. And they said, "Well, we have complained to the principal. Nothing happened."

So what did we do? We taught them how to organize themselves, where to go to ensure that maybe the principal was not the one that had□maybe we had to go to the city so that they were able to□well, who makes those decisions? So we were training them how to know where the power base was and where they could go to make those changes. Those were important lessons, and it was not what I thought was important. Eventually they came back to what I thought was important. But then I had started to gain some credibility with them, and that was important because that was my hometown, but I had been away from it for a while, and I had been at the university and I had been taught a lot of things and so forth and so on. So that was the concept of it, and it was very dynamic in terms of change for the poor, and that was exactly what it was meant on the War Against Poverty. How do we empower the most poorest who didn't know that they really had power if they organized and if they knew where to go to make changes? So that was the legacy that Opal Jones left me and the teachings that she taught me. I think that was one of the most dynamic things that happened. The program itself, countywide, made a lot of changes, put a lot of poor people into the system. Eventually, those that went forward ended up being social workers or being whatever was that agency's goal. We introduced them also, too. That's when we connected them to community colleges, and that's when they started, "Hey, there's no reason why I can't." Because especially the women, especially the women (Spanish phrase). We started having the women look at themselves, that they were very important. Anytime they would say, "(Spanish phrase)," "Oh, you're not just (Spanish phrase), you're a very important woman in that household."

Then it was like, "That's right. I cook, I'm a doctor, I'm a nurse, I help the children get to school." They started looking at their value as women, and that was a very, very important role. Some of them were in welfare, and that's where in East L.A. especially there was a movement, the Chicana Welfare Movement, that, again, was a Chicana who led it. We were taught that, oh, if you're in welfare, you should be ashamed. But she did a wonderful thing. She says, "If you're in welfare, you need it. It's for your children. It's provided there. You don't negotiate for what you want," because social workers used to treat them very, very bad. So all that was getting women to start thinking of theirself as valuable human beings, as contributing to the family stability, to the community. You don't just go to church and are active in the church. You're doing something valuable there. You're contributing. Because there were many programs that helped the poor in the churches, and they were part of that. They didn't see themselves that way. They weren't defining themselves. So we were helping them see themself and help them define themself. Not us define them, but help them. So there were a multiple of concepts that we're trying to get rid of that were barriers to our community, whether they were women, whether they were men, children, teenagers, because it did encompass a whole community that was poor. So it really was a very exciting program and one that I'm glad I played a role in it.

Then I met very strong black women. That was also very interesting. In Pacoima, that was the only place where minorities lived in the Valley. So it wasn't strange for me to interact with African Americans, to Asians, because that's where we all lived. But I had never seen strong black women in action, and I was impressed with how they dealt with it. At the beginning, it was real enlightening, because I had never encounter in□I had met women, but at that early stage Latinas who were strong, I had heard about (Spanish phrase). I had heard about that. But here in the United States at least I wasn't aware of the women that did exist, because there's always been Chicanas or Latinas and Mexicanas that have been active. We just didn't focus on them. We never gave them that platform to be viewed and to be seen. I wasn't that much acquainted. I knew my mother was a strong silent woman, but she made things happen. I know that she was a feminist now, which I didn't know then because that wasn't yet defined in me. I knew about (Spanish phrase). My mother always used to say, "(Spanish phrase)." That was her way of saying, "You as a woman, you're valuable. You're important." My mother was one that felt very strongly about educating her daughters and that women should do that. She was the one that taught me, well, it's important for you to get an education, from her point of view, in case something happens to your husband. How are you going to support your family? So she believed very strongly in education, in getting it us whatever career we wanted, that we had that freedom to choose. But she did, in her way, she was telling us how valuable we were as women. So it was very interesting, seeing all these women, these African American

women. Mary Henry was another woman who I met, and she passed away about a year ago. I'm sorry I wasn't able I didn't know, first of all, and, second, I would have really been there to pay tribute to what I saw in her, what she taught me, without her knowing that she was teaching me how to work better with low-income families, how to deal with the system, how to deal with learning more and more about political power. I knew it from my father's point of view, but this was a new experience that I was learning. So those women were very important in terms of teaching me, and they didn't even know it, maybe.

00:20:35

ESPINO:

Would you call them your first role models, activist role models?

TOVAR:

Other than Latinas, they were my first models. They really were. I mean, these were dynamic, incredible women that were working the African American community. That's, by the way, in NAPP was where I met the poet, my god and I just went to see her three years ago at CSUN. (Interruption)

00:21:07

ESPINO:

Okay, we're

TOVAR:

It was so exciting, and I didn't know she worked for NAPP.

ESPINO:

Maya Angelou.

00:21:42

TOVAR:

Maya Angelou. She was a wonderful woman, very nice, not pretentious. I didn't know her history. At that time, I didn't know her history. She was introduced as Maya Angelou, she was going to be working with Opal Jones, and she was a fabulous woman. I was a young woman, I was in my early twenties, and I didn't know that I was really dealing with a historical woman. Look at what she's even become more. I knew her.

Then years later, years later when I was working with Jerry Brown, fast forward, I went to a San Francisco luncheon honoring women of all colors, and Maya Angelou was there. By then I knew about her, and I said, "Oh, my god, I worked with her." I never thought she would remember me. She turns to me and says, "Hi, Irene. How are you?" I'm telling you, I was just, "Oh, my god, Maya Angelou knows me." Because I respected her so much and her commitment to people, poor people, and the important thing was they sort of reinforced what my parents had taught me, and that is that in all human beings, no matter what their resources, there's dignity. That was thing I think was so important, because I found that from my parents, and that was touching. I think that the idea of the dignity of every human being, no matter what their status, has motivated me, because I really become outraged when you see a poor person and somehow they're set aside because someone with better means gets priority. I guess it's both philosophically, religious, democratic concepts that I was taught by my parents, and it was so strong, and it still is strong in me, and it has affected my life completely. I know people sometimes look at the homeless with dismay, and they're smelly and they're dirty, but they're human beings, and why in this country do we have people who suffer? (Cries) (Interruption)

ESPINO:

I hope you're feeling better. I wanted to ask you a bit about Alinsky's strategy, because you said you went to find the grassroots leaders and you would hire them to work for the government. I'm assuming NAPP would be the government was paying the paycheck.

TOVAR:

It was, yes.

00:24:20

ESPINO:

But how did you find, how did you know, and when you were having your trainings, did you do role-playing? How did Opal Jones run the workshops or the trainings? How did you then go out and find people?

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TOVAR:

Obviously, Opal provided us with not only Alinsky but the top, at that time, trainers on how to organize low-income communities, because that was the thing that thought that we would overcome poverty, empowering the poor to go to the establishment and change them. So we received a lot of training. We actually had workshops that she would do, not only for us as directors, so that we would be in tune with what our mission was, but then also, too, as we hired people from the community, we also had training for them. They also got Alinsky's method of organizing and they became aware of how to deal with the establishment. So the training started with us and it went down to the people that were the community people. Now, the community people, because they lived in the neighborhood, we picked out the people that were most closest to the neighborhood, the ones that knew where everything was. I mean, they knew a day before if something was going to happen the next day, because their ears were to the ground of what was happening. So they got that training, how do you work in the community, how do you organize, how do you go block-to-block organizing. So we gave them details on how to organize a community. How do you look at your neighborhood, understand your community? Where does the leadership lie? It's not a congressman. It's not a city councilman. It's that neighborhood. Where is that leader? And the leader is not the stereotype that society usually thinks of, but that is a legitimate leader in that community.

So we taught them how to identify them. I gave you an example. La Senora Hernandez, there was a Senora Hernandez in East L.A., because there was a NAPP program in Boyle Heights, Mrs. Hernandez is a good example of that. Mrs. Hernandez was only Spanish-speaking, and everybody came to Mrs. Hernandez for advice and she was very amenable. She had the personality that made people trust her. She was resourceful. She had a natural knack in her as to how to go about changing it. She would put her complain in her ways and her Spanish. So what we did with Mrs. Hernandez is develop a well-trained monolingual Spanish-speaker advocate. She was beautiful. In her Spanish, she was a little literate, not completely, but she wrote her□first of all, she was embarrassed to write. We made her not feel embarrassed to write. So she would write her Spanish, and she would send it to□education was very important to her. She had children. So she became a strong advocate for her neighborhood on the education, the kind of teachers that were there, the kind of books that were not there. I mean, she really changed that school that her children were going through. We worked with her, but she was the leader. Not us. She was the leader. So those were the methods that we would teach them in terms of it. We, in turn, were to play a back role. We were to sit and watch the leadership and how they train, and advocate and supported them with resources and with knowledge on how it was, because some of them did not know how. Just like the story about the stop sign. They didn't know it was the City Council who decides on that, and they didn't know there's such a thing as a city councilperson, etc.

So those were the kind of things that we did. We took them with us to conferences. They also attended conferences, by the way, and that was the first time they had gone maybe into one of these hotels in which mostly attended by middle-class people. So we were opening their eyes to another world other than their neighborhood, but always to love their neighborhood, not to be ashamed, that they could make it better, that they could make sure that street cleaners did come and clean their streets, that by nature low-income people were stereotypes as being dirty. Look at the neighborhood. Look at their streets. Well, they didn't come. The city did not come and clean their neighborhood streets, or the garbage collector didn't necessarily come the day that they were supposed to and collect the garbage. So we started having the establishment, "Hey, you have an obligation to serve these residents. They have a legitimate□this is their home. You are being paid to clean it." So all of a sudden the garbage cleaner was coming in as they were supposed to, the trash was being picked up, or all of a sudden the parks were being better taken care of by the city. So those were the changes that were the result of empowering low-income families and knowing that they didn't have to take all that guff, the lack of services. So it changed neighborhoods little by

little. We still need to do more of that, but those programs, unfortunately, were very controversial because we were challenging the establishment, because we were holding them accountable, because we were showing them they really weren't serving the poor, that they did have biases. Why is it that somewhere in Beverly Hills the streets were being cleaned, there was never any question about that, and yet here you had to struggle just to have the garbage picked up? So those were the lessons that really were important, and they took those lessons and they started challenging.

Of course, the establishment doesn't like to be nudged. They don't, and especially very persistent people who you usually didn't think they had the ability or the intelligence to be served. So it was really a change that we were trying to create an accountability. In other words, we now use the words more□what is the word? Transparency. Now we use those kind of terms. But we were also making them accountable. How were you spending the money? How much money did this school get? How was that principal using it for? Were they buying books? They discovered books that were old or there was no library. I mean, those things were important, and we were trying to improve the neighborhoods, and by the people, by themselves. Then we went on to hire other□then we started expanding their view. Why is it important for you to register to vote? Why should you do that? What does that mean? How do we take something that appears so impersonal, going to a little box and X-ing? How did that directly affect you? So then we started dealing with other more, if we want to call it, sophisticated concepts in terms of about personalizing them. Well, if you don't vote for this, your children in your school, and we named the school, would not get Mrs. Hernandez or teacher Hernandez to have books for your children. So it became directly at my home. It impacts my house. So those were the kind of things that I think we played a role in.

00:32:16

ESPINO:

Did you have mandate from the government, the NAPP program itself, or was it Opal Jones' leadership?

00:34:3600:36:0800:38:08

TOVAR:

The way that that program came into being, Washington had the War Against Poverty money, and counties or states, sometimes states□well, actually it went from the county to the state. Excuse me, from Washington, D.C., the War Against Poverty went to the state, and then the state distributed to counties. Then the counties had organizations, GLACO (phonetic), for example, that was the term, Greater Los Angeles Community Action Committee. I think that was the thing. They, in turn, distributed the money to the counties. Now, let's say, in my area, Pacoima, let's say a group of people get together, which is how we got our Head Start Program. We got together, we say, hey, there's a need here, let's say, for a program that will do X, Y, Z, to fight poverty. We would write a proposal, submit it to the county poverty agency. They would review it. Then they would determine whether they would fund us or not. So that's the process that NAPP went through to get funded. It got funded through the county, which came from the feds to the state, to then the county. So that's how the funding went in most of the programs, whether they're NAPP or not. That also created a very interesting political thing, because for a while there, unfortunately, some people saw the poverty program only for African Americans in here. I'm talking about this county and other areas in the nation and some perhaps in other parts of the state of California. But because there was a little bit more diversity and there was poverty among people of color, but then there was some politicking, which I was not part of that, that took place in making those agency, those poverty agency, to see that there was data there that provided you had to deal with the poor, no matter what their color were, that there were white poor which we also served, by the way, in our program in Pacoima. We had poor blacks, African Americans, we had poor whites, and we had poor Chicanos. At that time it was Mexican Americans.

So mine was one of the most integrated ones because that was also, too, part of what we were taught very strongly, that these were funds for everybody who qualified. As a matter of fact, I had a very interesting experience as a NAPP director. Someone from a political office called me that they wanted a job and that they worked for XYZ. At that time it was so-called very chic to work in these programs. It was a well-off person, okay? And I said, "No, because you don't qualify for the criteria." Well, you can imagine what that created. I had calls letting me know that. I said, "Well, I stand my grounds." I could have possibly lost my job, but I think that because we had Opal Jones that didn't occur. This is my thought. Because they backed off. I said, "I'm standing my ground. If you want to go forward with it, you don't qualify, then I will speak out that you are forcing me to qualify you and you are depriving another low-income family." But those are some of the things that did happen, and theirs were political reasons, not the causes that we had. We were there to directly work with the community. So there were interesting experience.

But what I was about to say is that eventually GLACO there was a lot of□someone someday should do a thesis of the dynamics of what happened in the War on Poverty as far as the politics of it in L.A. County. There was some unpleasant things that happened. There was some divisions that occurred. I told you what I did as a director of the Los Angeles County Chicano Health Coalition, that coalition that I worked with, right after I left NAPP. That was part of that politicking in the wrong way, that instead of really using the criteria that anyone who was poor should do it. One of the reasons of the history of LACA, which is the Latin American Civic Association in the Valley, was that when we submitted our proposal to the county for funding, we had already had at least three years of working as a volunteer agency for preschoolers. Every year we took in twenty-five children. We raised our own private money. We went and we sold enchiladas. We had cake sales and all kinds of things to have one teacher. We paid one teacher to teach twenty-five children six hundred words in English, so that we would get them ready for elementary school. We had a waiting list. So when we went to the county anti-poverty fund, they told us, "Well, there's no poverty in the Valley." I said, "But look at our files. Look at the waiting list we had." So, luckily, Dr. Miguel Montes, who was the president of LACA, was the only one who had enough money to get a plane and go to

Washington, D.C. and get funded directly. That's how LACA got its originally funding for Head Start.

Then after that, we proved ourselves and then the county had to take us, because Washington said, "Hey, they should be getting funds directly from us. It should go directly through the local." So there were battles there in terms of the poverty money. But it did, for all of its strength and all of its weaknesses, it did a lot to bring change and to eventually prepare us for the changes that were about to come, both in the Chicano community and in the African American community. That's when some of those people that became the NAPP aides started thinking of their children's education, started pushing for them to go to college and so forth, and started the beginnings of what now may be in question of where we're going to go in higher education. But that was the roots of it in that time, in that time. That's not to say that there weren't efforts fifty years, a hundred years before that, but that, in our contemporary time, that was what was happening.

ESPINO:

Interesting, because it was supported by the government.

TOVAR:

That's right.

ESPINO:

So there was money behind it, not just lip service.

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TOVAR:

That right. That, I think, is an important point which I see lacking right now. I don't know how we're going to resolve it, because it's a different times with a different economics. Even progressive elected officials who may want to do that, if they don't have the money, and I think now it's more real that the money's not there. Before that they would always tell, "Oh, we don't have enough money for this," but there was always enough money. They always would look. If you were strong enough in your advocacy and if you were persistent, even somehow, "Well, you know what? We didn't realize we hadn't used this money," and all of a sudden the money was there.

This time, well, there's still some more monies there, but they're not sufficient enough for what the challenges are before us, because this is a different era. It's just like the era that I as a young woman faced when the Poverty Program came and the Civil Rights Movement. Because as I think about it now, as you get older, you start looking in terms of your life, you see periods of time that I witnessed. When I was a young woman, there was no computers, there was no TV, the beginning of TV, although there was no color TV. We started with a princess phone. Now, god, lord, smart phones. I'm still trying to understand what smart phones do or not do. So we have seen a lot of changes. We've seen job changes. We've seen the change in how we hire people. We've seen it open up to be more inclusive. We've seen the Chicano Movement. We've seen the African Americans. We've seen Asians. We've seen Women's Movement. Where are they? So it is a constant change that is happening. Hopefully it is a quiet revolution. Hopeful, by quiet, I mean there's no physical death, but who knows? I hope that doesn't happen. But maybe now because the poor is spread with everyone, there's more white. There's always been poor whites, always. That's another stereotype we've got to make sure we get rid of. Even in the sixties when I was involved, there were poor whites, and there were poor whites in welfare services. They benefitted there. It's so tragic how whites have been stereotyped. But now there's more and more whites that are poor, and to add onto it, some of them are educated poor whites.

Hopefully because they have more knowledge of the system and they have an education, they will be able to join forces with the advocates of getting rid of poverty to really make a change and to look at how we're going to resolve the needs of the poor, whether they're middle class or whether they're really so-called low income or low□you know, the social terminology that sociologists learn and teach us. But it is serious. It is a crisis. It is not a scare tactic. It's real. But I think we all need to really join forces, really, really join forces, and deal with it. It's very tragic. It could set us back. I know this is a phrase that is now used, but future generations will not have the benefits that we have, and we think we don't have all the benefits. I think that's tragic. The issue of homeless, of not having your home, of not even thinking of having a home in the future, of financial advisors indicating to you, "Well, it's not so bad if you rent apartments." When would you think of that? You were always working toward eventually having your own home. So there's a lot of dynamics that will change the face of America, and we have to look at our values and really be concerned about it. I saw Bill Moyer Sunday, in which he interviewed the former chair of Citi Group and what actually happened and how they really, really were about to

doom this country and why and how. Then they interviewed another senator who foresaw it and fought against getting rid of a law that was passed during Roosevelt era, the Glass-Steiner (phonetic) Act of 1933. I remember (unclear). That one was to have regulations and control over banks, because really banks have been the ones that have created all these crises.

It's so mind-blowing, and I wish more of us understood the significance of that and how that has created this crisis, and how we have to make sure that again that doesn't happen again and that certain regulations have to exist in order to control all of us. I mean, we're human. But the banks have a very serious responsibility over the economy, not only the nation. So, anyway, if anybody ever gets a chance to look into that, it would be very enlightening and it would put a lot of light into what the politicians right now are saying and who they're blaming and so forth and so on. But anyway□

ESPINO:

It's a really interesting era because it's so different from the one that you're talking about. I mean, the issues, many of them are the same for the poor, but the system is so different, the (unclear) is different.

TOVAR:

That's right. That's right. Absolutely.

ESPINO:

But I wanted to ask you a bit about the tensions among the different communities regarding the War on Poverty funds, because that's something that's been written about a little bit, but I want to hear from your experience exactly what were those tensions and what were those fights and the conflicts that you mentioned earlier.

00:46:0500:48:15

TOVAR:

The fights were really over money. The fights, that's as simple as can be, and it's over who got what. In reality, when you look at it objectively, is who had the power, who had the attention of the powerbrokers. Who were in the seats? I can understand African Americans because they fought a horrible fight. They were treated inhumane. I mean, that's a shameful part of our history in America.

In California, I can only address California, and even more parochial, L.A. County, what happened is some of the directors who ran the agencies that distributed the money, like GLACO, there was not enough Latino representation there. The hiring of the staff was not usual at the beginning, especially at the beginning was not really integrated, and so therefore there was conflicts or complaints by the Latino community, "Hey, there's no Latinos that you're hiring who will understand our problems. There's nobody there that in the board that can speak our issues," because eventually as a result of those complaints, they started electing who would be on the board, and that, in itself, became very political. They regionized, and they cut the county into regions, and they determined who□then it was like a political election for to sit on that board. That in itself created tensions and problems and very serious ones. Some of them I remember. One person that I know, who was not Latina but understood the Latina community, very, very good woman, at one point there was such a battle that they threw a chair at her at a board meeting. So it got tempers, I mean really, really serious. So there was that. See, that's what so sad, too, when you have little and give you something to the poor and it's not enough to the needs of the poor, that tension occurs and those battles occur, and that's exactly what happened at that time in the county. It created some distance between African Americans and Chicanos when our goal should have been to be working together to ask for more money, because it was a different time, economically speaking. It's not like now. But instead, we were given that amount of money and only one group was getting more of it, when it should have been really distributed more.

The sad thing about it is finally Latinos started having a little bit more to say in these boards, the money started dwindling. So it didn't matter if you were now the executive director of these agencies that funneled the money, because now the money wasn't there. So it didn't mean anything. So it was an ironic battle. You finally win, so-called get your input, and now there's no pie to divide. Of course, you know that there are a lot of people who didn't believe in the War Against Poverty, so you already had another element there that you had to contend with. Not everybody accepted the War Against Poverty. First of all, those that felt threatened because we were creating revolutionaries who were going before boards and commissions and challenging them, that was anti-American, when it was the most democratic thing we were teaching people. But those that didn't want the program called us all kinds of names, and then even sometimes

within our community we were called poverty pimps□I don't know if you heard that word□because we were being paid. Nobody, when they work, should not be paid if it's a legitimate honest work, right? It was not an easy job. It's never easy to work with the poor. I say this not in a negative way, but because there's so little resources, so little things, and it's not an easy job. Especially in that era, it was never an eight-to-five job because you were so committed. I remember□I was not the only one, so I'm not singling myself□we would go in early and maybe eleven, twelve o'clock we were still working, and the next day we would come back again and do the same thing over and over again. Yet there were those that, remember, they were bought into the system and would call us poverty pimps.

00:50:40

ESPINO:

But did you find in your experience that there were individuals who used it as a political steppingstone, used the agencies, the War on Poverty agencies, for their own personal political advancement?

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TOVAR:

You know, in everything, I think in life there always will be some people who do that. But because it was a poverty program and, again, because of that feeling toward it and whoever worked on it, those comments are made. The way I perceived it is think about it. Somebody runs for junior college board, and it's a steppingstone to become a governor. But it could be anything. Someone runs for the neighborhood councils that now are in the city, and already, oh, he's trying to or she's trying to run for the City Council. That is almost built into it. There were some people who did do it, like in every other system, you see, and some of them became well off. Some of them didn't make it. They thought they could, but they didn't because they really didn't have the feeling to help, really, the people, and eventually they are found out. So you can almost tell. If you're really in there, you can tell those that are using it and those that are using it for a good purpose, you see. So it's not always a blank thing. So I always like to first look more closely before I determine that that's it. But I'm sure that there have been, and I know there have been, but for the most part, I saw some people who later on ended up heading agencies that worked for to serve the people. They had to be sometimes shrewd because the times were not easy. Believe me, they were not easy for you to get funds. You had battles, and that was part of the reason, as I told you before, of the forming of the coalition of all these health providers that got monies from the Poverty Program as well as follow-up grants that came after that that, were not necessarily part of the Poverty Program, part of the philosophy of the fight against poverty.

So all of a sudden Chicanos decided, "Hey, why are we fighting each other? We've just been given some crumbs." That was one of the famous words. "We've just been given some crumbs. We should get more money because the need is here, and we can fight on the basis of the need is here." Not only do we have to know, but we also have to be able to have good strategies so that that money starts also coming to this community, not to exclude anybody who's poor. This is where the reasonable minds that felt the importance of any human being receiving, no matter what their color were, and there always would be some racist who their ideas are based on other things, other than serving anyone who's poor and to get more into the pot so we can serve all the poor. So eventually that fight in some ways became very successful and in some agencies still now exist in East L.A. who not only get federal, state funds, but even have other source of funding, foundations. We didn't know at that time about foundations, that they had money, too, and we always looked to public funds, but we were now learning that there was other source of funding. So that also has been a great lesson to our community. Foundations. Oh, foundations that actually fund. But there were battles. There were serious battles and there were, unfortunately, ill feelings between both groups. I think it was tragic, but it's in the nature, unfortunately, when you're dealing with limited resources and a lot of poor, or any other topic that you take in. But, hopefully, I see us□but it has different reasons why I think we are in a better relationship with African Americans and other people of colors. I think we've learned a lot in terms of that, and vice versa.

ESPINO:

Did you ever have discussions with Opal Jones about these issues? Do you remember her position on□considering she's African American and you're Mexican American?

00:56:52

TOVAR:

I say this respectfully. Her commitment was to African Americans, there's no doubt about it. That's what she did. That was her history. That's where she came from. But at the same time, she was smart enough to acknowledge that she had to serve all the poor. There was a battle between Boyle Heights and the director there with her on this sort of issue. But I also think that if you knew how to work with Opal, you could get her to serve all. But it was a matter more not a philosophical thing, but more of how you work with her. I had a very positive relationship with her. For whatever reason, it worked out well with me. The director of Boyle Heights had a different, I guess,

mode of operation or the way he worked there that it wasn't the same. But I think Opal realized that what Martin Luther King was talking about included all of us. But her commitment, and I don't criticize her for that, came from her strong roots in the African American community. I tried to make sure that the way I worked with her respected all the poor because my program was the most integrated. We had African Americans, grassroot people working with me. I had low-income whites working that I brought into the program, poor people. Obviously, I had Raza, which was the majority of the population, see.

But I was very open as to who was□look at the configuration of this community, so it has to reflect the people I hire, because we need to outreach to that population that represents more. But I never left out African Americans. I never left out poor whites in it. So that the only ones that didn't have enough figures, not because I had any intentions not to serve, was the Asian community, because they were mostly at that time, they were nursery. They were businesspeople at that time, and they didn't necessarily fit into the figures for the poverty qualifications. But anyone who would have qualified in my program would have come in. Also, too, income, just like I fought that man who wanted to come in who was very well off and who worked in a congressman's office, and I said, "No way. Otherwise I'll be untrue not only to my mission but also federal guidelines," I said. So that was it.

ESPINO:

Let's fast forward then to the Chicano Moratorium. That's where we left off last time. This was an important discussion about NAPP, so I wanted to go back and review that. But last time we were talking about your work with CSUN and the university, but we didn't get into any in-depth discussion of your role in the moratorium, the organizing and exactly how did that begin. That was '69 when you first started.

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TOVAR:

What happened, it was all part of this□in a way, the War on Poverty prepared us to know that we had rights, that we had the right to utilize the services of this country, and I think that was the strongest thing. So when our men went to□and I say "men" during that time because then it was predominantly men who went to the services, not to exclude our women who eventually have been playing more and more a role. But our Chicanos were going to war, we were not considered first-class citizens, we didn't have the rights, we didn't have political representations at that time. There was nobody trying to register us to vote. It was the quite the opposite unless we were. Resources were not coming into the community, including the War on Poverty, even though some came and trickled down to us.

So job opportunities, there was job discrimination. There was housing discrimination. So we were confronting all these issues, and yet our men were going to war and they were dying in the war in outrageous proportion to our population. Yet our men were giving their lives for our country, and our country was not responding to us. So we felt that that was not right. Cesar Chavez was marching for equality in the fields of California, the worst□I mean, when there was unions, they were not unionized. When there was benefits, they didn't have anything. So that kind of climate said, hey, this war is not our war. It's somebody else's war. Why are we involved in this war? First of all, besides the rationale, and I was one of those that believed that this was a war that we should not have fought, we organized in protest. The Chicano Moratorium and the Chicano Movement at that time, which almost appears one and the same because it really you could almost fight it, you could almost say the issue of the men dying in proportion to the benefits, at the same time you could say the conditions of the people there. But, anyway, it also split from the dominant war, Vietnam War protestors because Chicanos were not included in the movement of the dominant Vietnam War.

So Rosalio, and I think rightly so, said, "We can have our own. Wait. Our men are dying, we can organize our own." As you know, it was the most incredible movement. It set a tone that I haven't seen since. It's terrible that it's a war that brought us so close together, because there was such camaraderie, especially among us that were young at that time. Because really, in a way, we were not necessarily accepted by the older generation at that time, the World War II veterans. "Oh, you're being unpatriotic. We fought the war, and what are you talking about?" Then also protests. I mean, it wasn't necessarily that common at that time for protests. These are (Spanish phrase), that sort of thing. So while we, the younger generation, felt the strong need for protest for justice, there was a more conservative community in our community that were saying, "Well, this is the way to do it. Our men during World War II fought in World War I, and we didn't have to do that," and all this sort of thing. So what the moratorium did was to organize the young people and organize groups that you would never think would organize. I remember that in East L.A. we had Pintos who didn't work with you. There were different groups and gangs. All of a sudden they were saying, "Why are we killing each other? We're killing us. We're brothers. (Spanish phrase). Why are we fighting each other?" You know that the crime and gang death decreased during that era, because all of a sudden you had Pintos and you had gang members who were working together, who would never, never been in the same room, working together for justice. So it created a unity, a beautiful feeling.

Then there was the beginning of the college, the Chicanos that were now entering college, and we were uniting through our campuses. That was the exciting thing, and that's where I saw that at CSUN, when we were part of that effort. That's where we, the Valley, became very active, and I was one of those. I was the representative that liaison with the Los Angeles Coalition on the planning of the moratorium. I had a subgroup that was□really, I give them credit. My younger sister, (unclear), that was the ones that met when we didn't meet and really organized and brought□not only that I brought, but brought the message back to the area how we were going to participate in the different ones, both in our region here in the Valley and then in the overall planning for the big moratorium. That

happened all over the county. That was happening all over the county, and I was in the bigger committee that oversaw that sort of thing. But it raised also, too, an awareness in all those groups that had certain concerns about the establishment, the welfare rights, the Chicano welfare rights, Chicanos got involved with us, and we were building coalitions with different groups that had different concerns and protests over how we were being treated. So that in itself was exciting. The leadership with Rosalio was excellent in terms of bringing us together. I mean, that's incredible in terms of it was such a diverse group of people coming together and agreeing that we were not going to accept that our men had been dying and the benefits were not there. Think about it. I want to emphasize this, and I've said it before, there was only Roybal, the only congressman. There was only one labor leader, Estaban Torres. For that empower, that was it.

We didn't even realize what we did. We took on the establishment who was hostile toward us. That was the era where Republicans had a stronghold and protested our activities such as this. So we took that on and it frightened the establishment. It really did. That day is a painful, painful day, because we had planned that we were going to fight any of those, because I guess in any kind of protest there's always saboteurs. They were coming in from the Police Department. They were pretending they were part of the protest movement. They came to our meetings. They audited our meetings that we would have at the Euclid Center. They knew everything that was happening. They were photographing all of us. They knew who we were. It's not just a paranoia thing. Eventually that proved to be true. The Sheriff's Department was there. Before the day of the moratorium, I was not part of this, but Rosalio met with a group of people with the Sheriff's Department and actually gave them their plan. "This is what we're going to do. We have monitors. It's well organized." My sister was one of those monitors. We'd gotten some monitors. I haven't yet described the nationwide organization that we planned, but we had been given the delegation of Texas. We were going to house the delegation of Texas. Everybody in that committee overall took a certain state that was coming. We ended up having Texas. That meant we were to house them, feed them, and take them to that day to the moratorium. So I was in the park where we gave them breakfast and we found homes for them to stay. That was what I was responsible for doing in terms of it and making sure it happened. When I say "I," I want to make sure that I don't appear that I was the sole person, because I couldn't have done it without the support that we were all getting in our leadership role.

I remember that my sister had been very close, and I believe she even went to that meeting. We had given them the route. We had told them that we were not going to tolerate anyone who we thought might create a crisis. We were going to bring our families. We told them we were going to bring our grandmothers, we were going to bring our children, it was going to be a family event. So I remember we had to get buses from our Valley to take the marchers that were going to participate. So I believe we had four buses. I can't remember now exact, but I think it was four buses. Obviously, we had the obligations to those families who their young people came and for the adults that came with their children, because we made it known that this was a peaceful family thing, that we were protesting the war because, first of all, it was not a right war. It was not a moral war. Secondly, our men were dying and yet we were treated like second-rate citizen, to make it as simple as possible. That day the buses had left and I was part of cleaning up the park, Las Palmas Park, where we had the breakfast for the marchers. By the time we cleaned up, because we had convinced the city to let us use the park, I was on my way to it when all of a sudden the freeway started closing. They were rerouting us. At first, I thought it was just a normal whenever there's a parade or anything. Then all of a sudden as I was able to get out of the freeway, saw people running all over the place, and then I realized. Then I said, "Oh, my god." I didn't know all the details, but I knew something horrible had happened. Sure enough. I was concerned how do we find our people, not only the kids that were from here, but also, too, the people from Texas that we had bused.

My sister got gas. She was in the front of it. Our young people, who now are grandparents, were gassed, and, luckily□well, we had a lot of tragedies, as you know. There's a film that portrays what actually happened where the sheriffs□one that's so dramatic that I never can remember. It's a woman that's pregnant, and the sheriff comes from behind and hits her right around the neck and she just (demonstrates) falls. Children and everybody, it was really□we gave them the plan as to how they can destroy us. They knew exactly that. I'm convinced and no one will ever try to convince me that that was not□they made this little liquor store the way they were going to get rid of us, because if you really see some of these films, you see the people peacefully sitting, listening to some our singers. As a matter of fact, they were our Valley who were at that time playing. All of a sudden, you see the police come in and make this little thing, spread it out to the park. That's when everything just□and then the aftermath, my role was to raise money to bail out the kids that had been arrested, and that's when I saw the things you don't want to see: open heads. You could see the bones of the skull where they had broken, they had completely busted it. I went around and raised money. Because I had been also part of some of the other Rebuild L.A. and all of the other, I made that known to them that we were wanting to raise some money for those that couldn't be bailed out and try□we were scrounging for lawyers, were scrounging for money, so that sort of thing.

Interesting thing happened, I remember. I got a phone call, and I had talked to Rebuild L.A. It was Rebuild L.A., and Ralph Ochoa was the assistant director of it. I said, "Ralph, we need money. I don't know. People aren't rich. How can we raise some money? Can you pass the word around?" Somehow or other, I don't know how, I got a phone call and this lady said, "I want to contribute some money for you to help the people, but I don't want anybody to know that I gave the money. If you promise me that you'll never mention my name, I will give you $13,000." At that time, $13,000 was□I mean, think about it. That was a lot of money, $13,000. So I said, "I will never remember your name." And honestly, I don't remember her name. I really don't remember her name. Because I said, "Oh, my god, now we can get some of those kids out of jail." But now came the issue how do we channel that money with nobody knowing what her name was. So we figured out a way of doing it, and Ralph Ochoa played a role in helping me how that money was to be then distributed to a bail bondsman. He was from Fresno. Ramirez was his name. I'll never forget it. We almost took away his license, only because he over-bonded, got people out. You see, there were a lot of people who did suffer. They were so committed. This bail bondsman from Fresno let out so many people out with the little money that we had and almost lost his license, but he was doing it for a cause. Just like in another story, another battle, some Chicanos in the law schools fought and got arrested for protesting for affirmative action in the enrollment of students, and one of them was Ralph Ochoa, the one I just mentioned. At that time, that was going back, he had been a law student, and there had been a protest at UCLA Law School to include more monies for minorities to come into law school. Some of those guys who took those tests ended up being arrested, and then when they tried to become lawyers, there was a felony on them. Then we had to fight to make sure that that was taken away from them so that they could become lawyers.

So people did a lot to jeopardize their own lives. We sometimes don't remember that and we forget them, but they were there and they

did sacrifice their personal future, their careers. Luckily, there was a big push on it, and I was not part of that battle, but I knew of the battle, and I supported the battle of them getting back, cleaning off their felonies, because it had been a different times in our history. So there were different people, a bail bondsman, law students, students, college students who were about to get their degrees, the schools, the mothers, some of the people in the poverty programs, I think that also helped us, because we had already, without knowing, built leaders in the community who knew it. The other thing that happened as a result of the moratorium that day, that horrible, horrible day, is that it shocked the conservative Chicano who did support us. They didn't think that was possible. One side of the park had this big wire□well, for lack of better description, this fence that had chain fence, let's call it. Right across the street were houses. The park was within the neighborhood. So the performance was being done against that chain wall so that when the police came, it was difficult for them to get out, because the sheriffs were coming this way.

So some of them had to climb the chain fence, and some, I don't know how, they got out into the streets, and so they found haven on the people that live in those houses. To protect them, they went into those houses. Some of them were the very people who didn't believe what we were doing. After that, they were our allies. So in many ways that gained us the support we'd never had within our own community, the ones that were critical of us. But that happened. That gave us that. However, it did put a damper on some people who went there thinking it was really going to be peaceful, that they took their children, little□I mean, if you see the films on it, you see them with their little, what is it, carriage, little children□

ESPINO:

Stroller.

01:18:27

TOVAR:

Strollers that they were on. So it was meant to be a family affair, and it turned into a violent confrontation by the police against the people. That cooled some of the people who were peaceful people and who came just to demonstrate and to voice their opinion, because we didn't have any other voice. We didn't have any councilpeople who could voice our concern. We didn't have any governor. We didn't have any anybody in the power structure that we could really find support from. Bless his heart, I'll never forget Estaban Torres, because he was then□let me tell you what happened. After the moratorium, we had meetings on Soto and Brooklyn, what is now Cesar Chavez. There was the International Institute. We would meet there. Well, the police knew we were meeting, so they would be going around and around, and as soon as the meeting was over, they'd be arresting people. "Your light isn't working," or for any pretense to arrest us and to harass us. So it was not a friendly□even the aftermath of that day was very tense.

My house, I knew that in front of my house there was a car that would sit, and it was not a friendly car. They were watching whatever I did. After the moratorium, I don't know if I've already spoken about the inquest and how the role I played in the inquest. But, anyway, so then what you saw is that□I lost my train of thought. But what happened was that□

ESPINO:

You were going to say something about Estaban Torres, bless his heart.

01:20:3601:22:5101:24:5701:26:5701:28:4901:30:4601:33:09

TOVAR:

Estaban Torres, yes. We were being harassed that way, and our kids were being arrested, and we were being□luckily, for whatever reason, I never ended up being in that position, but because I was part of the□we had press conference and we declared who we were. We were not hiding who we were. We were proud of what we had stood for. But since we only had one congressman and the only person that could possibly had the establishment look to them was the head of the UAW, which was Estaban Torres. Estaban Torres, we had a press conference with him, and we outlined how we were being harassed. There's some pictures. I don't know if Rosalio has shown you the pictures. That's where he's so nice. He gives me a lot of credit that I was the only woman in that time, but there were others. But we stood our ground, and he came, and as a result of someone who did have influence, the UAW, a labor organization, a very liberal organization, came in our support, and that they started backing off a little bit. We didn't have anybody else. We were like the orphan child. So I will always appreciate Estaban for having done that. The last time I saw him was maybe about, what, six months ago at the county redistricting hearings. So we're still there. We're still fighting, much older, but we're still there. We're not giving in. That's great.

So, anyway, that happened and so that's sort of a little bit eased off, "Be careful how you treat these Mexicans," but it was very difficult. From there it ended up with the horrible death of Ruben Salazar, a newspaper person, freedom of the press. If you hear some of the□I don't know if you've talked to Rosalio for more details on what has been happening, trying to get out the records of the death of Ruben Salazar. I went during this efforts of the L.A. newspaper person to open up the records of it. I went to the county where they have the records. I saw the records. They wanted to show me. Well, I could have had access to the actual pictures of Ruben Salazar after the projectile. I didn't want to see it. I don't want to remember him that way. So I haven't kept up with the status of it. But we are asking that Lee Baca releases the official records and what really went on, the projectile, which was already outlawed by the federal government. It's not supposed to have been used. Why did they use it? So there's a lot of reasons that don't make sense, and so I think it's only fair that we find out exactly what happened and why was it that they had that projectile. Why is that they had to use it? But that frightened a lot of people and it sort of put a damper on what could have still continued on. They were afraid. It was the most impressive thing you can imagine, Virginia, in terms because there were marches before that. But when you see all of a sudden hundreds and hundreds of Chicanos coming and coming and coming, I sometimes hear the word "Born in America," the song, and "Born in East L.A." and all of sudden you see them. All of a sudden all these people are coming, and I think about it, and not necessarily (unclear).

But the people as they come, all of a sudden you start seeing one and then (unclear). I mean, I still get chills thinking of that image of how we were trying to empower ourselves for our rights, for our rights that every American has the right to have not to have to fight for it, and so proud that who we were, that we were part of the fiber of this country, especially to the South. My god, how can you take a thread out of a fiber? That's who we are. We're part of the history of the South, because we were hundreds and thousands of years ago. All of sudden, we're standing up for who we were, the dignity of who we were, our culture, our language, our citizenship, because we are Americans. Sometimes this offends people, but it's the truth. We didn't have to cross the ocean to be here. We're part of the fiber of the Americas a long time before English was ever spoken. So anyway, it was really a tense moment. They created the Board of Supervisors superficial inquest committee, and I was invited to be part of it, and we met. That's when there were testimony regarding into the death of Ruben Salazar, and they were going to make a findings. Really, it was nothing. We were always searched when we had the hearings. They were being televised. Brokaw, by the way, was a young reporter at that time, covering the inquest hearing. As a matter of fact, he interviewed me, but it didn't mean anything. It really didn't. They didn't even really give full coverage even to what we were saying. What happened, we would come in, we would have to be screened. They would search our purses as if we were going to do something terrible. No one ever did anything. But we were being watched very closely.

I remember one day in the summer, we didn't have a meeting, so I was home, and my nephew was a little boy, and my sister, we decided to walk around because it was so hot. We'd walk around the neighborhood. It was about nine o'clock. All of a sudden, a helicopter comes and it was noisy, and it hovered over my house. I said, "Oh, my god, what is that?" My sister Yolanda said, "Oh, it's here every night." I said, "Every night, and you haven't told me? Look it." And it leaves, and I said okay. Then there was someone from the Department of Justice, Cano (phonetic) was the one that was supervised, because the Department of Justice had come in, the federal Department of Justice had come in to oversee what was going and how could we reduce tension and all that kind. You know the role they play. He had given us his phone so that if anything happened to us, because some people were being beaten and being abused, and they could always□remember that time, the word of the police was it. So I called him and I said, "Cano, let me tell you what has been happening and I didn't even know it. I just witnessed a helicopter come and only throw lights at my house and then takes off. I'm being harassed and I didn't even know it. My father just had his first heart attack." I didn't know there were going to be more. I said, "I'm holding the Valley City responsible for this," because it was the city of Los Angeles. I lived in Pacoima. I said, "If anything happens to my dad, and this is part of harassment, and I want it stopped."

Well, the next morning, I went to the inquest, and I was sitting□this whole procedure, I was searched, and I sat down. All of a sudden, a female police officer comes, and I guess they identified who I was. She sat next to me and she says, "Oh, we're very sorry that this is happening, but we want to assure you that it's not being focused on you." I said, "How can it not be focused on me? The light comes right to my house, and I have witnesses. The neighborhood says that this has been happening," all for, what, I don't even remember how long this had been happening. I said, "And they are not related to me, so my family has experienced it, the neighborhood has experienced it, and I want it stopped. I'm going to hold you responsible." She says, "Oh, you know, there's been a lot of thefts on the San Fernando Road, car thefts." I said, "Oh, no, you don't focus on those cars. You focus on my house. I want you to know right now you stop that or I will sue you." Partly I was angry, and at the same time I say, "Oh, my god, how am I going to find a lawyer in case I have to sue?" (Laughs) Magic? That night, no helicopters. Because I had reported to the United States Justice Department, and, bless Cano, he called them right away. The next day I was assured that that was not going to happen. But those are ways that maybe other people would have been frightened off, and I must admit it frightened me for my family. I was daring enough not to think of my safety, but I was more concerned with my father and my family that had been going through this. I said, "Yolanda, don't ever take anything."

My family did, unfortunately□they say that they audit you at random. It was interesting one year, all of us in our family were audited in terms of how we spend our money, etc. We had to go to the IRS and let them know, show our documents. I wasn't earning that much money in the first place, but still it was harassment. So there's ways. One of the things I often try to tell young activists is that know the consequences, know the consequences when you take on the establishment on issues that you firmly believe in, knowing that the establishment will come back not with a mild little slap on your hand, but with a hammer and hit you if they can. And know that you probably will establish yourself as a□there will be those that love you and will be with you in your community. There will be those even that differ with you in your own community, and sometimes it hurts because you feel so sincere and dedicated to what you're doing, and you know you're not doing it for anything other than to better our society. And there will be those outside your own community who have greater resources and greater means of disrupting your life and the life of your family. This goes even way back to when my brother became a highway patrolman and how they penalized him after they did a background investigation and found out that I was a Brown Beret, which was not true. I wouldn't deny it if I had been, but I was not. But they made my brother's life very, very difficult. They called me an anti-police, a radical, and so therefore how could they want a highway patrol in their family.

It carried even to when the governor appointed me to the State Personnel Board. The commissioner, which is the name of the head of the

Department of the Highway Patrol, and this the governor told me directly. He said, "You know, Irene, I had the highway patrol come to me, and I was trying to see how we could work together. If you really had been wanting to get together, you would not have appointed Irene Tovar to the State Personnel Board." I said, "Oh, my god, I should put that in letter. That's my badge of courage." But they made my life, my brother who sympathized with me, but he wanted to be a police officer. That was his dream. I must say I respect my brother because of the things I've learned about how he's handled crisis and how he's worked with gangs and everything. I wish more officers thought that way, and not because he's my brother, but I think it has to do with how we were taught by my parents. So there's consequences. There's consequence, and they're painful. Sometimes you suffer financially also, not only in terms of your family, but then some people won't hire you that don't believe in what you do. But what sometimes is even more painful is by the people who support you and could hire you, but they think that their program will be damaged if they hired you. I can understand that, but at the same time you have that mixed feeling that, oh, my god, how am I going to now live and support me, my family or whatever it is. But those are part of the consequences, and I'll tell you I have no regrets for what I did or how I did it because I can be proud to say that all the picket lines that I led, and I led many, I never had any of my picketers hit or violated while I was in charge of the picket line. But I was purposely, because I loved and cared about them, I was strict with them. They had to bide by the acceptable rules of picketing. There are rules on picketing. You don't obstruct traffic. You don't obstruct an entrance or an exit. You don't call police the names we felt like calling them.

The police actually would come to your face and take your pictures to harass you to see if you would react. The word I always used to say, and I guess it hung, "Do you want to help the enemy? If you do, then that's what he's baiting you. So don't give him ammunition to use against you." I must say that I was so concerned about their welfare that I feel very fortunate that none of my picketers ever got hurt or banged or anything. I said it's very important, if you really believe in la causa, you won't allow them get you and use you. I said, "The best way you can do that is by you saying something that they're just (unclear) or action that you want to take." Hopefully, I'm wrong, but we may enter another era if the economy keeps on. Eventually people can't take it anymore and they'll react, and I hope that it doesn't lead to the things that I saw. I didn't see even some worse things that I heard and knew that took place.

01:34:36

ESPINO:

I think that's a great place to stop now in the current crisis, because we're just getting off of the Oakland Occupy and the arrest and there has been a lot of blood and injuries.

TOVAR:

That's exactly, yes.

ESPINO:

But next time I'd like to talk about the inquisition.

TOVAR:

Inquest, you mean.

ESPINO:

Inquest, I mean.

TOVAR:

I feel like it was an inquisition. (Laughs)

ESPINO:

Inquest, yes.

TOVAR:

Yes.

ESPINO:

I'm going to stop it here because it's going (End of January 31, 2012 interview)

SESSION EIGHT (February 6, 2012)

00:00:08

ESPINO:

This is Virginia Espino, and today is February 6, 2012. I'm interviewing Irene Tovar at her home in Mission Hills.

We're going to start today where we left off last time, and that is the aftermath of the Chicano Moratorium March, the August 29th. You were talking to me before we started about the inquest, and if you could just maybe reiterate some of those issues that were part of that.

00:02:1800:04:3200:06:44

TOVAR:

Yes. Mine's is now of what I remember. What I remember is that some of us were selected, and it was the Board of Supervisors. What I recollect, it was Debs, Supervisor Debs, who created this after some negotiations with some other people in the community, such as Esteban Torres, such as also role that played Senator Cranston that came about, because we had very little allies. So the purpose of it was that we were supposed to observed the inquest to make sure that it was fair, that it was conducted. Well, all those didn't happen. All we were were observers. We couldn't comment. We couldn't even write written comments about it or ask questions, etc. We were just observers, like if you would go to a movie, except the actors were there in live that we were seeing. That was where Raúl Ruíz made the most important comments and questioning about how it took place. At that time, the only means that we had to comment was not through a formal way within that inquest, but really through the media. At that time, Tom Brokaw was a young reporter, and so he would ask us some questions if he felt like it, or if we tried to push something that we didn't like. That was the only way that we got a comment to make, but really it was insignificant in terms of having an impact on the results or how we felt, etc., in an official capacity, because whatever we commented or whatever we said to them was not part of the record of the final report of the inquest.

As you know, obviously the Office of the Sheriff, who was the sheriff who did the projectile, got off free, so it didn't satisfy us. It left us very dissatisfied and some people very angry, but more important some of us thought, "Hmm, we're outside. We have really, really no power." We knew that before, but it now became very dramatic for some of us. That was my reaction to us. It was so vivid in my mind. We don't have any power, and yet look at how many of us there are. Look at our history. We're not strangers. We're part of it. Ever since there's been a United States in California, we've been there and we were there before. I said, "We cannot leave our community with all these issues, with all those problems," because we still paid taxes. I was still paying taxes. They didn't say if you're a Mexican, you do not pay federal taxes, state taxes, etc. So we said, "You know what? I'm a citizen. I have every right under the Constitution." So I said, "How can I?" Then I personalized it, "How can I then continue in my small way (Spanish word)," and I guess some other people thought of it too. The (Spanish word) took a different phase, a different sound. Some of those things that resulted were making sure that the schools were more accountable to our children so we would have less dropouts. Now there was a Chicano for the first time in the Los Angeles County Board of Education. We then decided that there's two things that move politicians: money and votes. We may not have had the money, but we definitely, if we worked on it, we could have votes. So we started, all of us, in some way or the other, including

myself, started voter registration drives in our areas that we worked with our local organizations, Chicano organizations.

Out of that we were built the National Council of La Raza, the Southwest voter registration drive. We knew that we had to work on getting more elected officials, so we were doing that. Out of that, we became supporters of candidates that were not Latino but who were sympathetic and more open to our involvement. Bradley. We had Bradley. We had Carter on the national level. Some of us went even to Washington, D.C. on September 16 with Carter when he was□as a matter of fact, I have a picture. That very day, Carter was supposed to meet with us, but he ended up having to sign that treaty with the Egyptian President of the time, so he couldn't, so Mrs. Carter met with us. It's interesting because she had around her neck a chilies necklace, with red chilies. As a matter of fact, I have a picture of that. So it started getting not only on the local level, the state level. We worked with Brown, Jerry Brown, and, as I said before, Bradley, Cranston. We became more politically involved in the power structure, in the system, to give our input. By giving our input, our thoughts that we would change the policies that were being made so it would be more inclusive, and so that became one of my objectives. How do we change the policies so they better reflect our needs, our concerns? I think that's something that we have to continue to do that, especially now, because we fought very, very hard. We wanted to open the universities, because we knew we needed a professional group of people who would best be able to serve our community, whether they were attorneys, whether they were teachers, whatever profession they chose. We had to get them into that higher education system, the development of the middle class, which is a very important part of a democracy.

Because most of us were working, we were poor, working poor, that was about the level that the majority. That's not to deny that there were other Latinos and Mexican Americans that were attorneys already, but they were conspicuous by their absence. I was one of five students at my university, California State University of Northridge. Now they make up one-third of that student body population. That, to me, is part of the (Spanish word). It takes a different phase. It takes a different way that we're doing it, a different sound.

ESPINO:

Edward Roybal was in office at the time of the moratorium.

TOVAR:

Roybal, yes.

ESPINO:

Did he take any role?

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TOVAR:

He did. But remember that one of the things that even I didn't understand, because I respected him, but I thought he could have done more. I didn't realize he was one, the only Latino congressman. But he did play a role, not as visible as we would have wanted to, but he understood better than we the politics of the time, that he still had to survive to give input in Washington, and he did. He played a role with Cranston in making some of the things happening, the subsiding, some negotiation that happened. Rosalio was more involved in this part, I was not, in having meetings with the business community, the big honchos of the city, how to tamper with these Mexicans that were picketing. They were afraid.

One of the things that is tragic is that in this country we have a habit of not paying attention seriously to problems until they're blown out of proportion. We've done it with the walkouts. We've done it with the things that have happened in Watts, the different situations when there have been burned buildings, etc. It's not that precarious, the attention then of the power structure, because then all of a sudden they feel jeopardized, and then they're willing to compromise. But they did play, and Ed Roybal did play a role. I was not part of that effort, but I knew of it and so did Rosalio and some other people that played a role in that. So he did. We expected more of him. In retrospect, we look back and we say, "Oh, now that we understand more the power structure and maybe that was the only option he had, and maybe that was the best option." In that era, I wanted him to be out there upfront with us. I wanted him to have participated in our TV conferences that we had where we exposed it. Esteban Torres did do that, though. That's why I really have such great admiration for him, and he was part of that aftermath of the business community and etc. So that basically is my (unclear) as far as Ed. I know it was hard to be the first one, and as I have moved and been the first one in many things myself, now I understand. Even though I had my personality

somehow makes me make more public statements than perhaps I should, but I felt that I had to. I had to make sure that they knew where we stood, that we were not window-dressing Mexicans. Because a lot of times the system plucks you in but it's only for you to sit there and fill a seat, and I have never wanted to be someone who just filled a seat. I wanted to make sure that I gave the input, that I felt I had an obligation.

The minute I accept any kind of appointment, yes, I'm concerned, and I sincerely say this. I'm concerned for the welfare. Let's say it's in a state appointment. I'm concerned about the state of California. It's my state. I was born here. Whatever affects it, no matter what color you are, affects me. But I also want to make sure that those policies that I'm sitting in also reflect the interest of a community that has been completely neglected and left to survive in its own. It's not coincidence that the poor have less services. It's not coincidence. Then we blame the poor for being dirty or being this or that. But when we're not included, when we're not ignored or not thought of that we even exist, that's the greatest neglect. That's the greatest insult to human dignity. Remember, I've told you how strongly I felt about human dignity, and poverty does do that to the human being. Then we treat them as if they were less than citizens or less than people. "Oh, they're dirty. Look at their streets." Well, the city doesn't come in and sweep those streets. But it's not until we started getting Latinos, Chicanos from those areas to get elected that changes. All of a sudden, the trucks come in to clean the streets. It happened here in the San Fernando Valley. Pacoima didn't have any sidewalks in certain key areas, and the press wouldn't believe it. One day they called me, said, "Irene, is it true that there are no sidewalks in Pacoima?" I said, "Yes, and I would invite you to come and look at it." They couldn't believe it.

So that's the revolution we're talking about, getting men and women with a sense of conscience, with a sense of commitment to better the community that we want in those positions. Frankly, I don't want sitters on the seat, that that's all they fill. So it's going. We are accomplishing things. I'm now very concerned, to the point of alarm, that because of the financial crisis that, in my opinion, were created by the establishment, Wall Street, etc., who's suffering the most if not those we were trying to give a better opportunity to be self-sufficient and productive citizens, because that's really our goal, to make our community self-sufficient. I'm very concerned that the things that we fought for, the things that some people died for, that now we may no longer have. The university are now cutting down enrollment. We made a great strive to get our young people to the universities. Now that's going to cut off a lot of our people. We're putting more stringent tests in terms of who can enter the university, and that means that usually our community will be out, or those that□and even the non-Latino community will be left out. But we have always made a commitment that higher education in California was for everyone, free higher education. It was the dream. The master plan had that thought in mind. Our community college, which is the best way that low-income children and young people and even older people can go and start a career at a minimum of cost, that is also eroding. The cutbacks are dramatic. That means that we are going backwards, that all of those strives, all those things that were accomplished as an effort of many sacrifices may be going.

So we have to affirm our commitment to it, not to be comfortable, because now I've made it or I'm okay now, I'm all right. We all have to get back together again and made sure that we know that if there are cuts□and I face the reality that some of them that we may not have any choice, but how those cut happened is a key thing. We have to be there at the cutting board. We have to make sure that the way the cut happens, it doesn't eradicate what we've done. Now you may say, well, how? One example that I remember we did when I was with the State Personnel Board and we were facing layoffs was that we□and at the time we had worked very hard to implement affirmative action, and we had actually gotten for the first time in the history of the state of California more Latinos in state government jobs. We said, "Okay. If we're going to have a layoff, if we go by seniority, that means our people are out." Because they were the□what is it, the first hired, the last hired□

ESPINO:

The last hired, first fired.

00:17:00

TOVAR:

□first fired. So we said, "In proportion. Let's leave it in proportion to what it was at the time of the layoffs." Fortunately, we didn't get to the full effort to implement the full impact of that. But when there were some layoffs, it was in proportion to the population, job population of that time, for the state, which meant that we did do layoffs, but we didn't dramatically take off last hired, first fired. I think we can be more creative and devise more equitable ways of dealing with it as we come to that stages, but we need to be there. We need to be there to be vanguards, that there's not unequal sacrifice of our community. As it is, it's at a disadvantage. So those are the kind of things that concerns me in every aspect of our life, that unless we're there and unless we're the ones that are willing to speak up and are comfortable pressing the issue, that we will lose.

That means generations, another generation that we will lose, and how do we repair it back? Does that mean that my nephews and nieces will not have the same opportunity that a Chicano ten years ago would have had? Even though he already had some disadvantages, it was still better before the Chicano Moratorium.

ESPINO:

Are you saying that you had this realization at the inquest? That was when you first started□

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TOVAR:

It was a start of that. It was a start of that. Because we lived through it, we realize that, okay, so we may not be able to get everybody to regroup again and do that march again because it was so painful. Some people literally dropped off and they didn't want to. Because, remember, we went having sat with the Los Angeles County sheriffs and we laid out the plans. We went as friends, naively thinking that that was going to prove to them we were going to have a peaceful march. We were inviting our parents. We were inviting our grandparents. We were inviting our children. How could we possibly jeopardize our family? If anything was proof of our good intention, was that. Yet look what happened. Children, women, no one, everybody was fair play at that moratorium by the sheriffs and the LAPD. So we learned a hard lesson, a painful lesson. From my point of view, we knew that there was power in numbers. That we knew. We knew that we had been able to get the attention part of the media, thank god to Ruben Salazar. But he was a victim of that openness. So we knew that anyone in our community was fair play for the system.

It was a different political time too. The conservative element of the party, of the Republican Party, was playing a role in that or other plans that were being made by them in terms of how they would take over California. We sort of disrupted that, so they did not want us around in that way. As I sat there and as I told you, we had no role other than to be observers. The other thing is that we who were there were even harassed, and I told you the incident in terms of what was happening at my house at nine o'clock at night very punctually. I resented that they tried to harass me and make me fear so that I would not be part of it. That action by them made me even feel stronger, that I was not going to be frightened off, that I was going to keep on with my concerns about what was happening to our community, to fight for our rights, but that perhaps I needed to do it a little bit different and get better results. So that was the reason why then I dealt□well, one of them is to definitely get us to get registered and to vote and become citizens. Always I've always been a strong supporter of that. Secondly is we had to find ways of how do we get into where the powers were and where decisions were being made that affected us. Obviously, as I said, the school system, the universities, businesses, developing and supporting organizations such as MALDEF, that we were part of that aftermath. Everybody took on a different role in many ways. I may not have been the founder of MALDEF, but we were supporting it. We were there. We attending their fundraising events. We supported them. In whatever manner was needed, we were there. That was a movement, the way I identify it, so a continuation of the Chicano Movement, an effort to become really part of the decision-making that affects our lives, our daily lives.

Now I want to make sure that our younger generation who benefited from that effort remember that the battle is still on, that we have to do it. Maybe we can do it differently, and maybe we can still use the same tools that we used before. There's nothing wrong with picketing. Now we know how to have press conferences. Before when we didn't, now we know how to connect with elected officials. Now we have our own Latino elected officials who we don't have to start out by convincing them. It was always we knew what we had to do when we went to a non-Latino. We first had to educate him. Part of the meeting was educating him on, "Look, this is the issues, this is what's happening, this is how our community is being affected. This is what we'd like you to do for us." Now we have to□most of that, other than how, what want you to do with us, it's already a given for the good elected who represents and has an interest in his community. So that in itself is a change. Now he doesn't have to argue back, "Well, why do you think it should be done? So-and-so group did it before. Why are you now wanting□?" That sort of conversation, for the most part, that I've been experiencing isn't that there. There's still issues. One of them which we still have a battle is the issue of the undocumented, and that one you always have to□I did know this, but I was shocked about a couple of months ago when someone told me, "Do you know what the crime of coming into this country is?"

I said, "Well, a serious federal□." A misdemeanor. I said, "Are you sure?" The way they treated, the amount of money that is being spent on building a wall that could go to education, to make sure that these young people became citizens, that went to college, who would then have a career, who when then be part of the economy of this country, they would be paying taxes, they would have their health insurance. They could buy their own home. Well, I now am a little bit wary on that one. But being part of the benefits of being a citizen of this country, and so it really is something we're going to have to struggle. Not even our fellow Democrats are willing to really be courageous enough and take this issue on. Every day we see animosity towards Mexicans is even stronger than ever. The Minutemen are around. As I was talking to you, I can't believe I read an email from Rudy Acuña, the burning of books, the eradicating of Ethnic Studies, Chicano Studies. My god, what? Why isn't there a big clamor not only from us as Chicanos, but just because that's part of our rights as Americans, no matter what color. How are you endangering the freedom of speech, these freedoms that we have? That's what I'm sort of disappointed, but I don't give up. Despite everything, I believe that we should never give up, that we have a responsibility to educate the dominant group on these issues. Something that has been bothering me, and I'm so sorry that I didn't hear the beginning of this, in the news somewhere in the Middle West there's a Latina, she's not Mexican American. She's, I believe, Salvadoran, was found to be illegal. She had a child and they took the child away from her and put the child up for adoption without her permission because she was illegal.

As I was passing through the TV, I heard it, and so that attracted my attention. I'm trying to trace back what state that was, the name of the woman, because it's going on right now. She hasn't seen her child in four years. How can we do that? How can we take a child by force out of this woman? She's a mother. She feels for her child. She loves her child. She came here for the very reasons that everybody comes, for a better opportunity and life for their children. If anybody has lived through poverty and knows the pain of poverty, how can

you not understand someone willing to risk it, to go to where it is better for your child? Even plants move toward the sun because they can grow. To me, it's inhumane, and I don't know where the conscience of our country is, and the average citizen is insane. We are not this way. We are not that callous. We are not that unabiding for what is justice. I'll have to work on that and I'll have to convince others to work on that, so it's big, big struggle ahead of us.

ESPINO:

Yes. That's something that we'll definitely come back to before we're wrapped up today, what's the current climate. But I want to ask you about if you've been following the release of the inquest documents, and if you've been able to read some of those documents. Did you find any new information? Did you find anything that helped you understand what happened better?

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TOVAR:

What is it? About maybe nine months ago, Rosalio Muñoz invited me to see the records, because a newspaperman from the Los Angeles Times is trying to get the sheriffs to open those records for public exposure. From what I understand, the issue is still going on, so it hasn't been public, but some of us were able to see some of those documents. They're in boxes. They're not organized at all. It's like nobody cared. They just threw them together. There's no logic to it. So I saw some of those documents, including pictures of Ruben Salazar after the incident, or his death. I found it very hard to see them, and I did not see them, purposely. I want to remember Ruben as a newspaperman who was willing to sacrifice his life to really promote what is so basic in America, and that is freedom of the press and investigative reporting, because that's what he was doing. He knew, by what we have been able to ascertain, that he expressed his knowledge that he was being watched and that he even had police officers, sheriffs go to his office and tell him that he should lay low.

So those documents are one of the things that I understand. The last report that I got, because we did go see them, is that they're going to put, I guess, some order to them, and now the negotiation is going on as to whether there will or will not be a release. But even the disorganization of it shows you how little they thought of a killing of a human being, a newspaperman. We often hear in other countries where they're killing their newspaper people or editors or this or the judges, and we have done that too. So we have to look at ourselves. Where are our values? We have to persist to find out what actually happened. We know or we have a strong feeling as to what happened, but did the establishment really face it? I understand that there are some people□and I didn't see this; Rosalio has□that has admitted that some things were not inappropriate, but they were not even willing to say that publicly or in the inquest. So those were the records that we want to see to find out exactly what happened.

ESPINO:

What is your inkling of what happened? From your being there that day, from being part of the inquest, what do you think? Do they think they purposely killed him?

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TOVAR:

I am convinced that they purposely killed him, and let me tell you why. Because I believe it's almost a week before the actual moratorium, he had lunch with some people. One of them was one of the active people in the movimiento, in the moratorium. The other one was Phil Montes, who was with the Civil Rights Commission. He let them know that he felt that they wanted to kill him, and he enumerated how and why, including that visit that is known that the sheriffs made to him. Ruben Salazar was a pretty level guy, in my opinion, very well respected, not only when he was here in California but in Texas, as a newspaperman. He had had very responsible positions in Mexico City, representing the L.A. Times. So someone like that doesn't make up things. Or someone like that doesn't fabricate situations like that. So I do believe that he was targeted and that they were going to put an end to him, because he was exposing things that they didn't want them to do because it was not part of the master plan of those in power. So I do believe he was killed purposely, because even though we played and I played a much smaller role as far as the power of the pen, why would someone try to intimidate me at my home? I was active, I said what I felt, but that was my right as a citizen. If they tamper with me, who wasn't the power of a pen, why wouldn't they do it to him who was really writing about them, how police were brutalizing the community at the time?

Bear in mind, I understand we need law enforcement. I'm not anti, like we were labeled anti-police. I do believe that we need law enforcement to keep order and so forth, but it's the abuse that I will always, always be against. That was exactly what we were against.

We were against the abusement of police officers. Another thing that happened as a result really of the moratorium is that many of us have continued to be the conscience of law enforcement. I have served in various committees and commissions that ensures that police officers are better trained, better educated, know that they have limits, that even though they're the only ones that officially can kill someone and the law will support you, that there is an obligation to that incredible power to take lives. As you've seen, there's been a few of those happening even at the present time that are very questionable. But it's the abuse of it, not that we're my brother was a law enforcement officer, and we are law abiding, irregardless, and I'm talking about our community. Irregardless, the majority of our community are law-abiding citizen. But in every group there's someone who's going to break the law, but that doesn't reflect all of the people of that particular group. So those are the kind of things I think we've been able to make changes on making a law enforcement that is more sensitive to people, more respect for ethnic communities, a greater appreciation. The police who are now more working with communities, low-income communities, as partners instead of as an enemies. So I think it has taken different forms as the movimiento.

That one is a very sensitive one in our community and will continue to be, but as long as we have entrée into the chief of police, the mayors, and we speak up when those things occur or we make suggestions on how we can better, I think I consider that part of the change that resulted as a way of the Chicano Moratorium. So for me, it hasn't died, it's still going on, and it will continue. As long as there's human beings and as long as we have interactions and we have practice our right to express our dissatisfaction with things, it will still have to be on the vanguard. But I am convinced that in the future, not that issues will not go away, they will never. We are humans. There will always be issues. As long as there's poverty, as long as there's those that are more powerful than less of the population, there will always be differences. There will always have to be, unfortunately, conflict. But we have to work just very hard. We have to continue to be on the vanguard to ensure that our kids finish high schools, that they go on to college, that they vote, that those that are not citizens become citizens, so that we can be empowered to be part of making the systems more fair, more equitable, more representative. Isn't that part of the democratic process? Isn't that part of democracy, that every human being has the dignity and the right to benefit from its goals, to be we use the word "American Dream." Sometimes I said I don't want to hear it anymore. It's changing, by the way, even for non-Latinos. The American Dream, we're going to have to redefined it. So those are the challenges that I see, but I'm optimistic. As long as we have life and this is what I say. As long as I have life, as long as I am physically able to, as long as I'm able to speak, I will try my very best to reflect my concerns where there are injustices. But I would like to do it as a group. I would like us to all of us be in the same tune that we do right now, especially right now. We should ring an alarm. Right now we should be ringing an alarm, because it is serious. It's not like other times.

ESPINO:

It's interesting, because getting back to the moratorium and the death of Ruben Salazar, today you have lots of people, lots of Latinos, Mexicanos principally, in positions of power. The mayor is Mexican American. Gloria Molina on the City Council or supervisor, she's Mexican American. Vaca (phonetic). But we're still not able to get the answers. Why do you think that is?

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TOVAR:

Well, that is a question we all ask. They become public officials and they are responsible for the total city. The mayor of Los Angeles is not a mayor just for the Mexicans. So he has to play the role that every elected official has to do, and that is to deal with the other stakeholders of the city. I think as a result of him being a mayor, there have been some changes, but they're not all the changes that we would like. So that is, I think, what happened. They have other people in the establishment and other people in the groups now that come, and so the pie is limited. So he's going to have to learn how to keep his constituents, all of his constituents, and I don't mean it in place, but knowing that he is reacting to their needs. In that pie, we may not get all the things we have. I wish we would do it on the basis of needs. He who needs the most will get the most help, right? But it doesn't happen in politics, because you have other people who want their needs met, and they may not care or they may think the other needs of others are just as important as yours. So that's part of the problem.

I hope that as we educate the non-Latino community, they will understand and be more receptive to meeting more of the needs of those that need it, and, unfortunately, in the city of Los Angeles the poor comprise a large percentage of Mexican Americans, Latinos. Then when you're elected, you want to be reelected. If your other constituents, who have more money, who have more power, don't think you're addressing their needs, well, he's an elected official or she's an elected official, and she may have to give in to some of the things. The other thing you mentioned, the Board of Supervisors, and I'm glad you reminded me of that, right now based on the 2000 census, there should be another Latino in the Board of Supervisors. There's been great resistance by the existing supervisors against creating that district, and that means that only a small portion that Gloria has a power to or has jurisdiction over is being addressed. The needs of other Latinos in other portions of the county are not being met, because unfortunately and you say, "Why are you saying that? I mean, Joe Blow White is a good guy, and he's really, really trying to serve." Yes, he is or she is, but what I have observed, and I say "observed," is that somehow if you are a Latino who really is going there to make your district better and to improve situations, you feel it. You feel it more. I'll give you an example. In the city in this valley where I have lived most of my life, I supported actively all the candidates that I thought best served the needs of our community. I went out there and I got the vote and I spoke on their behalf, and I did what you do when you actively support a candidate. They were good men, and I say "men," because there hasn't been a woman elected in this woman for those positions. They were very progressive, and they were known by their history and all kinds of things. Yet I don't understand why until we got some Chicanos elected to those positions did we not have pavements on our streets. We didn't have the potholes filled. We

didn't have more federal funding come in or state funding, or we didn't have other improvements that have come when they could have come when I selected or when I voted actively for the others ones.

And why they didn't even hire young students in their staff as□what do they call them? Well, they hire young people who work for them and represent them. Until the Latinos got elected, and then their staff didn't even come to our community meetings or we didn't see them that often. With elected officials, Latinos, every major event that we have in our community, every fundraiser that we have for whatever cause we're supporting, they're there. They're coming and they're representing and so forth. Then we get the elected officials themselves come and visit us, not only when we're trying to get them to vote, which they used to. So why? The question is why. You want to work with everyone, whoever is the elected official, irrespective of their ethnic background. But there's a difference. There's a difference. That has to be understood, and I don't say it angrily, but I have to make sure that if there is someone who is not Latino who is running and gets elected in an area that is predominantly Latino, that he or she comes to the community, not only when he's running for office, that he or she hires their□for the life of me right now, the word is on the tip of my tongue□these young people who learn how the system works. They're employees. They represent the elected officials. They go to meetings. They hear what complaints come from the citizens. They're bilingual. They can speak to the community both in Spanish and in English. They then do the work to find out why this constituent has a problem and resolves it.

That is a difference, is a difference, and the issue is why, if they're of the same□they say they believe in the certain things we believe in, and yet the end results is very different. I hope that will change for the non-Latino elected officials, because if they're really interested in every single one of their constituents and they acknowledge that there is a large constituency that is Mexican American, Latino, and they do it, I have no problems with what color they are. They're serving the people. There's no doubt that a Latino or Latina elected official is a wonderful role model for a community, and we should have it. Just like every other group wants that, so do we. So I just hope that as we get these elected Latino are courageous enough, let me put it that way, to stand up for who they are and that they do serve that community and that they're willing sometime to take a little risk that they may turn off one of their other constituents who's better off and explains it and works with them to help them understand what's going on.

00:46:54

ESPINO:

That's a really good segue into your experience with Governor Brown. That's Governor Jerry Brown in '78. Because he's a white politician. How was he on the Mexican American question, on the Latino question?

TOVAR:

That's one example of what I'm talking about. Jerry Brown came from a father who was a politician who never had the kind of experience I had in living in poverty and fighting for the rights of Latinos and the rights from woman. I'll cut the story short in terms of it because I think□

ESPINO:

No, we're good. You don't have to cut it short.

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TOVAR:

When I first met Jerry Brown, I had been a product of a community college and I understood its value for the Chicano community. So I knew that maybe I didn't have a chance to succeed in being a Board of Trustees because at that time the school, the L.A. Unified School District, had jurisdiction over community colleges. Then they split. In other words, the community college were going to have their own board and their elected officials. At that time there were thirteen positions that were going to be open. No one had ever run in that new created board, so I decided to run. I decided to run, not having the money that you need, not having all the resources that a candidate normally has. But I had been active and I had some kind of name recognition. I ran more as a person that wanted to highlight the importance of Latinos in community college and the value for our community. Luckily, there was 133 candidates, so some people got together in the power structure and in the liberal, more progressive system, and they decided, "Well, you know, we have 133. We got to get some good people there." Luckily, I ended up being one of those candidates that became part of the community-college-endorsed candidates.

So that's when I met Jerry Brown, because he was running for the first time, and, of course, he had much better support and name recognition and part of the movimiento. So that was my first meeting with him, and it was a very casual, not very deep kind of meeting, but I met him and I knew him, and we were in joint appearances in terms of promoting our candidacy, our slate. Then I didn't see him any more after that. He won, obviously, I didn't, but I got pretty close. I was surprised. So what happened is that, moving fast forward, I had been part of the campus at CSUN, an employee of the CSUN for three years, and I had seen the effects of Ronald Reagan and his anger and his policies against activism, against minorities that were active for opening the higher education system to minorities. I was very disappointed and upset with how he had dealt with the state university system. So Jerry Brown ran, and I decided that I was going to, as always I feel that if you complain and you don't do anything about it, then that's your fault. But I was going to do something about it. So I would go on an average about two or three times a week to his campaign offices and would do phone calls, never talking to him at all, just going there, giving my time, take off, because it was in L.A. So he ended up winning. There was one thing. I guess someone on the staff said, "You know, you have a very committed volunteer who comes in, does phone calls," and da, da, da, da, and all that kind of stuff. So one day I heard that he wanted to talk to me. He wanted to talk to me, and I guessed to thank me. So I waited and I waited and waited, and I had to get back so I just left. I left.

The next time he did meet me on time. (Laughs) So we talked and I said, "Well, I hope you win, and whatever I can do to help," and that was about it. That was it. He ended up being elected governor. So he got elected governor, hooray, and I was doing my thing with Bradley as far as being a president of the Civil Service Commission. I had become a president. I was a little bit disappointed. I wanted more affirmative action, but that's another story. So I went to this meeting because Jerry Brown had just appointed Mario Obledo the first Chicano to a cabinet position in the state of California. Mario had invited many people throughout the state of California to get him acquainted to what was his obligation, his duty, and get feedback from the Latino community, Mexican American community. So I was invited to that meeting. So I was at the meeting and some people came in late, about maybe seven to eight or ten people. There was a lot of people. We got reintroduced, and when I mentioned my name, they, "Oh! We need to talk to you before the meeting is over." I didn't know them. I didn't know a single one of them. So I did, I waited after the meeting. I met with them, and they wanted me to get appointed to the State Personnel Board. The reason was that there was a commitment that Jerry Brown had made to at that time it would have been Assemblyman Alex Garcia, who had been an aide to Roybal. Alex Garcia said, I understand, to Jerry Brown, "I will endorse you if you will appoint a Latino to the State Personnel Board." I said, "Oh, well, I don't think I want to be appointed to that. I'm already a president of the Civil Service Commission in Los Angeles. I believe in spreading out." I really was sincere. I really feel that we should give other people the opportunity, plus I don't think and they said, "Well, there's another Latino, but he's from a smaller town that he's in the civil service. You're in a big city and president of a big city. You're a Chicana," and so forth.

I said, "Well, thank you very much for the compliment, but I really think that I'm not interested. I don't have the means to be how often does it meet and so forth?" Because with the Civil Service, the city of Los Angeles, you got $10 for parking and maybe lunch. That was your payment for being a volunteer. I said, "I don't think I can afford," because they told me they met usually in Sacramento, every now in San Francisco, and it was usually like a two- to three-day meeting. I said, "First of all, I do not have the means to travel that often to Sacramento or San Francisco, and if they stay two to three days, I cannot pay hotels and that sort of thing." They said, "No, the state pays you, and on top of that, you get a little salary on the side." I couldn't believe this. Even then I said, "No, I don't think so," because I really was sort of still with that attitude of with the moratorium, high expectation. I liked Tom Bradley. I supported him. As a matter of fact, they said that the reason I didn't win getting the Board of Trustees is because Tom Bradley endorsed me, and at that time there was a climate against an African American being a mayor. So for me to be supported by an African American, that's what some people thought I had not, because I did pretty well, interesting enough. But I was proud that I had received his endorsement. I never would have taken it back, irrespect of what they would have advised me. But, anyway, because there were some board trustees that did not want his endorsement because they knew of that feeling. I knew it, but I didn't care because I said, "Hey, I believe in this and I'm going to stand by that."

So, anyway, fast forward. So I was disappointed, but again with that reality that a minority candidate or politician has to serve all, he could not serve just the needs of a particular group, and the city Civil Service Commission again faced the reality that there wasn't enough minorities in their pool of applicants, which I was hoping to do more changes, and it wasn't what I think it should have been. So I said, you know, the frustration, what it takes out of me, because I felt so strongly, so passionate about it, I said, "No, I don't think I want to." They tried to tell me, "Well, listen, if you don't, you have the best chance, otherwise it's not going to go to a Latino," da, da, da. I was starting to feel more and more guilty. I genuinely was feeling so guilty, I was really, "Oh, my god, how can I do it when I really don't feel that I'll be able to do my best job for it?" I was skeptical and doubtful. I didn't yet understand fully the power of the State Personnel Board, and that's, I think, why had I known that, it would have been an easier decision for me to make. So I did not want to be a window-dressing. So finally after much probing, and, bless their hearts, and I don't even know now who they were, because I didn't know them and I never saw them afterwards, they pushed me on it. I finally said, after a lot of guilt and a lot of reflection on whether I would be able to do the job or not, I thought I had the capabilities. I just didn't understand, maybe, how influential that board was and the power that it gave.

So I finally accepted, and I was interviewed. Then one night around nine o'clock at night, I get a phone call and it's Jerry Brown. I didn't think it was really Jerry Brown. I thought somebody was kidding. It was Jerry Brown, and he said that he was considering me for the State Personnel Board. I said, "Well, being that I was disappointed that I couldn't do what I thought I could have done at the city, Jerry, let me first tell you who I am, because I don't want you afterwards, me having your label as your appointee, I don't want you to feel that you did a wrong appointment. Let me tell you what I stand for. I believe in affirmative action," and I went down the things that I believed in, and I went down on my past history so that I'm, an activist. I believe in this, I'm against the war, and I went down through my I said, "If you still think that you want me as an appointee, then I will accept it. But I want you to know all these things." Because in the city I had been in the list of the people who were not in the good list, and I had been taken off the list of the troublemakers of the city, and that was owed to a Chicano who Bradley had appointed to the Police Commission. He convinced the chief of police at that time, Chief Ed Davis, that the people that on that list, subversive that was the word I was looking for were really just people who believed in certain rights and were really fighting for justice. As a matter of fact, that led me to a luncheon meeting with Ed Davis, who met with me to so-

called get acquainted with me, that I was not anti-police, that I was not a member of the Brown Berets, which I wasn't. Had I been, I would have never denied it, because I felt that they done a courageous thing in the movement. But later on, that little meeting had some effect when eventually we were trying to get Cruz Reynoso appointed to the state supreme court. But going forward on this, so then he said, "Well, let me think about it." So he hung up and I said, "Oh, that's the end of it," because I told him I didn't someone afterwards to□you know, because I would have to go to the state senate for approval and all that sort of thing. So he called maybe about ten minutes later. He said, "Irene, I'm going to appoint you. Can you be tomorrow at my□we have a reservation for you to come to Sacramento tomorrow at nine o'clock in the morning to the State Personnel Board meeting." I said, "What? Okay." I don't know. I had never really□I had flown, but not that often, so I got my sister was with me. I said, "Can you go with me?" My sister took my nephew, who was then a little boy, now he's forty years old, and we went. To top it all, Sacramento, which I was supposed to learn, has fog, and so we were there for the plane to leave. It never left off until about three o'clock in the afternoon. We arrive late, and Jerry signed us off. The next morning I went to the board. I actually went to the last part of the meeting, and that's how I got appointed. Now, Jerry□I served there about five years of a ten-year appointment, because then he asked me□because I did do some changes. I was the first minority. There had never been a male or female minority in that board. Think about it. I learned that it was one of the most powerful quiet commissions in state government. Because it was the state employer, it set the standards for the hiring, the tests that were to be conducted for people to get into the civil service list. It was the one that recommended to the state legislature the salary of all state employees.

It also adjudicated decisions or grievances employees had made. At that time, state employees did not have collective bargaining rights. During my tenure in that position, we ended up implementing collective bargaining for employees. During that time, and I was very assertive, let me put it that way, in making sure that every state department had an affirmative action plan. Now, that was not easy to accomplish because there was resistance to minority hiring. There was resistance to Chicano hiring. As I looked at the data, because the first thing I did is I looked at the data of the population of state employees, the least represented, obviously, were Chicanos. The least and less-paid employee was Chicana women. We were at the bottom pole. As a result of that, I mandated the establishment of a Chicana taskforce to look into how we could make sure that the testing□and this now went across the board, but in this task force, how testing might be an adverse to minority hiring, Chicana hiring, how we could make and develop upward mobility programs for the underrepresented, to make sure that we dealt with equitable pay for all women, to make sure that grievances were dealt fairly. That meant that we had to integrate our hearing officers so that they were also equally represented, because sometimes the Personnel Board would automatically agree with the termination of the department, which meant we were just supporting the establishment which was not representative. So we made sure that now what used to happen is that board members used to just stamp, oh, the recommendation of the hearing office says terminate, and that was it. I went and I read it. It created more work for me. It was not a so-called part-time board. For me it became a full-time board, even though I did not get paid, which that wasn't the issue with me. So I had to do more intensive work, question, I would question, and sometimes I went and many times I went against the decision of the hearing officer, because I made sure that we heard the actual comments made by those that were grieving, and many of them were minorities and many of them were women. It was a different story than if the hearing officer just heard it and just said, "Approved," never hearing the other side.

So that was a change that was happening. Now, what does Jerry Brown has to do with it? Jerry Brown never, never called me and said, "No, you're moving too fast. You're not doing it. You're bringing too many minorities. You're affecting my political image." Nothing, ever, ever. That was at the State Personnel Board. The other thing we did is that we used to have□as an example, we looked and reviewed, which appears very minor, reviewed the titles of all jobs. They were sexist. For example, firemen. Now we call them firefighters. All the ones that had sex, in other words, indicated they were only for men or they were men oriented, like firefighters, we started declassifying them and giving them new titles so that they were better reflective that anyone who was interested. We looked into height. It used to be that highway patrolmen could only be very tall, and that in itself excluded at the beginning Asians or Latinos who were not. I remember one hearing, a highway patrolman came and testified in front of us that they did not think we should lower the height rate, he says, "Because you cannot see. As a police officer, you have to see far ahead of you."

I said, "Well, what happens if there's a truck in front of you? Do you have to have them eight feet tall?" (Laughs) Anyway, they lost. They lost that argument, and now even the city has lowered that standard way back (unclear). So those things that appear so insignificant really were barriers for including minorities and disabled, for example. During our era, the disabled, we implemented for disabilities, nondiscrimination against disability. We also made sure we didn't ask questions about people's sexual preference. All those were happening. Then I did some events for Jerry Brown because I really was□I mean, I never got any criticism or any calling, like sometime elected officials do to their appointees. I was fulfilling what I (unclear). We were including Latinos into the service system. They were being bilingual. Another thing that I did, which the state did not have and the city did, and that is bilingual pay. Chicanas, for example, which comprised most of the clerical, were clerical workers being paid clerical pay the same as their other fellow nonminority employee. However, the clerk or the secretary who was Latina translated documents in Spanish, wrote letters in Spanish, did many, many things that were not in the job description, and yet she was being paid the same as a nonbilingual employee. As a result of her doing more work, sometimes she got behind some work and then she was penalized and reprimanded for not catching up, and yet she did extra duties.

So I argued that they should get differential pay. I didn't call them bonus, because it really wasn't a bonus, but it was an extra skill that they were bringing into, and that there should be some equalization of the distribution of work. That was a big issue at that time, but I didn't have the votes. I was the only Brown appointee at that time, and I tried for a whole year to get two more board members, because I needed three votes for that to pass. I was sort of getting the Italian, I always remember him, both Republican, because they all were Republicans, to sort of start being sympathetic, and I needed now that one vote. He had committed himself, and so every time I would bring it up, "Oh, well, let's take it for a study." I said, "How much more do we need to study for a whole year?" So then a vacancy was about to occur on the board, and I set up an appointment with Jerry Brown. I said, "Jerry, please, please, appoint the next one that is sympathetic to bilingual differential pay," and I outlined why I thought it was right and fair. Would you believe it, the next appointment, he gave me my third vote. (Laughs) That was Jerry Brown, and he was not Latino. He did it. I talked to him. So then I said, "God, I can't believe this. Jerry Brown is really in tune with what I believe is important." So I did some events for him. Then the other thing he said he wanted to□I did an event for acknowledging the Chicanas that he had appointed at the Biltmore Hotel, and I had filled the whole ballroom. I did this on my own, not as□you know. I brought in, I filled up the whole ballroom at the Biltmore Hotel. He came. As a

matter of fact, I have some pictures of that. But as I was calling all these appointees of his, it was Juanita Hernandez, advisory to the Juan Lopez, advisory to the da, da, da. I started seeing a pattern there, and I said, "Hmm, this doesn't look right." So I had another meeting with him. By then I had done my homework. I had outlined all the appointees, both Chicanos and Chicanas and their titles on it. I said, "Jerry, I want to talk to you. I was looking at all your appointees, and you know what? They seem to be only advisory positions. I saw the other appointees you've made, and they're in boards and commissions. Some of them are full-time boards and some of them are very important boards, which they make policies. They develop policies, public policy." He hadn't realized it, I guess. I remember he said, "Is that public document?" I said, "Yes, Jerry." He says, "Okay. You give me names of Chicanas and Chicanos that can qualify this, and I'll appoint them." And you know what? He did. We got judges for the first time appointed the first I remember (unclear), the first Chicana as a judge. We got Chicanos and Chicanas to full-time boards and commissions that were not window-dressing. We were changing not only the employment of the state of California to better represent Chicanos and Chicanas; we were getting appointees to boards and commissions who are very important. Then came the big one for the state supreme court. At that time Cruz Reynoso was the most obvious and the best candidate that we could get. However, he was not a friend of the growers, because he had been the executive director of the Rural Legal Defense Fund, and those were the attorneys. Remember, those were created to defend low-income families and workers. So they defended many of the farm workers had been abused or taken advantage of by the growers. So he was not liked. Obviously the growers, most of them were Republican. If they were not Republican, they felt the same way that he was not something that they liked.

So we felt that there was going to be a problem with his appointment, and here comes my past. By then Chief Ed Davis was Senator Ed Davis, and he was a Republican. So I set up an appointment with Ed Davis, and I brought with me Cruz Reynoso to the apartment where he lived when he was in Sacramento, and I introduced him. The reason I was able to get that appointment is because I had now knew him from way back, and I had become, interesting enough, I guess, in his eyes, a friend, that I was not a terrorist or something like that. (Laughs) The word at that time was not used, terrorist. But anyway, so he did set up a meeting. He even cooked for us. We broke bread. He asked questions of Reynoso in terms of what kind of person he was and that he was not a radical and some kind of terrible activist. I asked him, I said, "Could you help us get the support of the Republicans for him? It means a lot to our community to for the first time have a Chicano on the Supreme Court." He says, "Well, Irene, let me see what I can do, but Deukmejian and I are not necessarily meeting eye-to-eye." At that time Deukmejian was not the governor, but was a very influential politician within the Republican Party. I said, "Oh, we would appreciate if you could do whatever you can. It means so much to us." I was not the only one working on seeing how we could (unclear) them, but this was my role in terms of Cruz Reynoso's appointment.

So he says, "Let me see what I can do, Irene. He seems like an okay guy." So we left, and then came the day that Cruz Reynoso had to go before the senate for approval. As you know, the governor appoints and the senate approves. So would you believe it? He got the votes and he became a member of the State Personnel Board. Now, this is Jerry Brown, a non-Latino. That's why I say that, yes, I do want Latinos appointed. They do bring that knowledge of our community and for some excellent commitment and follow-through on them making the community better, but if there is a decent politician of whatever color, because now it's not only Anglos, it's Asians, it's African Americans, whatever, if they have that sense of commitment for fairness and justice and serving the people, I have no problems. So far I've seen great changes as a result of us having Latinos in elected positions. In the state legislature, they're very key now when there was only Alex Garcia way back, so it does make a difference. I'm not saying it doesn't. But Jerry Brown, I feel that I will always be supportive of him. Sometimes he sort of does something that you don't understand, but then when the end result, then he does do the right thing. Now I'm talking about his present period of governor. So I will always feel very indebted that he was my best boss, that he really gave me carte blanche. He really invited me to be part of his staff. That's when I became the special assistant to the governor, and that's when I also used that position to make sure that the departments were more open, that included, that responded to Chicano problems. For example, there was one little department that dealt with giving licenses to construction companies. This poor Latino company had been trying to get their permit for over six months, way over six months. Every time he would try to get his certificate, they would say, "Well, we lost it. Could you send us another one?"

He had gone, I think, three or four times doing that, and finally he came to my office when I was working with Jerry. I said, "I can't believe this." He showed me all the documents and everything. He says, "And at the same time, I have a project, and I cannot do it because I cannot do it unless I have that license, and the amount has been increasing because of the costs of the material, etc." So I picked up the phone. I picked up the phone, and I was able to talk directly to the director, and I said, "I have here a constituent that has come to Jerry Brown with this concern, and Jerry Brown would like to know how you're going to fix it." Within twenty-four hours, that man had his certificate. Jerry Brown had empowered me to make that call, and I made many, many calls similar to that, that made it much more open for state service to serve all its constituents. So that's just a short little story of many I could tell you that Jerry Brown did do. One day I hope I'm the one, but if not, someone should write about all those things that he did, because there's no governor before him or since then that have done as much as Jerry Brown did during that era. These times are very hard. I don't know what that will happen. But I think his commitment is still there. It's a hard one that he's in, but I still have a lot of hope that it will not for the era, for the time, we will lose some, but I think in the end results it's too short yet to see what that legacy will be the second time. But I have a lot of faith in him that he will make a difference and may be the best under the circumstances. But I'll tell you, no one has been like Jerry Brown, no one.

Now, I went to Sacramento a month ago, and I couldn't believe all these gray-haired persons that got jobs during Jerry Brown's era now, and now their children were going to the universities, and now they were planning on their retirement. I mean, I'm not talking about a few; I'm talking about a lot in terms of it opened the opportunities. It also gave a new generation knowledge about how the system worked, how they could make it work, how they could get jobs, how they could get better pay, be self-sufficient, and for their children to benefit. So that is really what the Chicano Movement has meant to me. I'm not picketing now. Not that I don't think it's a good thing. I still support it. But I'm now doing the movimiento in a different way, and to me that still is part of the movimiento.

ESPINO:

Do you think the Chicana Conference was part of the movimiento, and what were the issues that you were trying to address?

TOVAR:

Oh, absolutely.

ESPINO:

Because this happened later in the eighties.

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TOVAR:

Yes. This is how it happened. This was really my idea. I've got to give myself credit on this. I'm in the Governor's Office. I see the need factually, the factual need of Chicanas being so underrepresented on all aspects of it. Knowing the power of the governor, the most influential politician in the state, can make things happen, I would like to create a governor's Chicana Issue Conference, that we focus on the issues, the needs of Chicanas.

We had gotten some Chicanas to boards and commissions, but how about the Chicanas that don't have those opportunities? How about the Chicanas at the bottom? How are we going to address those needs? There are organizations of Chicanas that are just professional Chicanas, and that's good, because you need that, but how about the poor woman that doesn't have any resources or limited resources or are struggling? How do we get the system to address those needs? So I said, first of all, the governor doesn't have money and makes it a point that we cannot use state money for many things. He always wanted us to find out how we could go out and□you know. I said, what if I organized a statewide□bless Alinsky□get Chicanos throughout the state to form a committee that will plan this conference, and we will go to the public sector and raise the money for the conference. That way the governor can't tell me, "No, Irene, we don't have the budget for it." The only thing that he will spend is my time devoted to that. So I created a committee, and what was so wonderful about it, because it had other effects of it, where there were no Chicana organizations, it helped form Chicana organizations in that area. So in a way it created Chicano/Chicana groups, advocates throughout the state, because we were supposed to pick Chicanas from each region of the state of California. I dealt with the concept, but it was the work of the other Chicanas statewide that were so anxious to have something like that. We raised money from the private sector, and then we were did have it in Los Angeles. But we said, "How are we going to host all these women?" I felt that if I got 1,000 women, I would have had the most successful conference ever, 1,000 women. That was our goal, and statewide, and I said, "We've got to have at least 1,000."

We talked to USC. USC that weekend would provide us with their housing for free, no costs. We charged $21 for registration, only to cover the meals and things that we could not get donated. We had workshops on every conceivable topic that affected Chicanas, that affected women. We were able to get Chicanas of every profession. I was so elated to find out that we had Chicanas where I thought in professions that we didn't think□it was just the numbers. We had at that time Chicanas in every profession, but the numbers were limited. Like I may have one architect on this or one whatever on this, and it was limited. They would make a club of one, but we had them. Then I said, how about also dealing□and this was not only my idea, but the arts. Chicana artists, painters, writers, let's deal with that aspect, not only the issue of social needs but economics and arts. So we did. That day we had 2,000 women Chicanas in attendance, 2,000 of them. As a matter of fact, our workshops, we had rooms for all the workshops. We had so many that they ended up under a tree. We had workshops under a tree. We made little groups all over the place, all over USC. That's where we had our conference. In it, a report came back, every workshops had a report, and out of that we made a report on what the findings were of those Chicanas. The attempt was to do a follow-up. That was a goal. We never accomplished that, unfortunately, but we did have it.

The main speaker was Jerry Brown. He came to the event, and he was overwhelmed, overwhelmed, on the massive amount of Chicanas that had come. So that, I think, has left imprints on his, too, on his mind. Because I did it also for CBEC, the California Bilingual Education Committee. I did the same thing, and he was overwhelmed again because of the numbers. I think he recognized our presence. I also give him credit that maybe because he also wanted at one time to be a Jesuit, that also that serves part of what makes his personality different than other politicians. But, anyway, we had the 2,000. We even had money left over, and it all didn't cost the state money other than my time. The tragedy of it is that□which is a lesson that we have to see how we can change□that none of the cabinet members, which I invited, attended. Not the females. In politics, there's always (unclear). I was fortunate that Jerry did support me very much, and I'll always be grateful to him for that, because other times when Latinos are elected by politicians, they're just a figurehead over here. We in the Latino community complain about them, but, in fact, they're not empowered and their boss doesn't empower them. I was empowered by my boss, Jerry Brown. Gray Davis was my immediate boss, but I could go to Jerry. I could always go to Jerry and talk to

him about what I thought should happen. I worked very hard, but I think it was always successful, the events that I planned for the governor, and I think that made a difference, too. I wanted to show him that we were capable and able to do what his other staff did.

So some of us who are minorities always feel that we've got to be examples that we're competent, we're able, and yet how tragic, because we're also regular human beings. But that was his contribution that he made in that era, and it was a very exciting era, and many, many changes occurred as a result of that, not only as figures, the numbers of Chicanos that came into state government, but the policies that changed that were more reflective of the needs of the community. The community now saw more people when they walked into a state building, someone there that could speak to them, whether it was in Spanish or in English, but someone that they could feel identify more courtesy by state employees toward the people. So I'm proud that I served with him in that era and that he really was□I say he gave me carte blanche. I remember one time saying, "Jerry, if there's a time when you think that I'm not doing something that□you know, let you let me know." He says, "Irene, I'll let you know." (Laughter) I never had that call.

ESPINO:

It must have been hard to leave having all that power. How did it end or what was the change?

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TOVAR:

The thing about it, the change was that I had a lot of support from Jerry Brown, but in politics if you're so viewed as, well, she has all this influence, everybody wants to be close to the□to be a groupie. I never was a groupie. I respected him very, very much, but I was never a groupie. If he wanted to talk to me, he would call me. When I wanted to set up a meeting, his people would always make it so difficult. I would have to struggle.

Eventually I was working long hours, and I didn't mind it. I was going in there very early, and I was the last one leaving, to the point that the Capitol Police used to accompany me to my car because it was so late and in the park there had been crimes. There's always been, unfortunately, that problem. I didn't mind it, but what I couldn't deal with and it became very frustrating is that I had urgent things that I need to get to the governor, and I would have to fight so much to get an appointment with him, unless I were to catch him while he was□you know, because I didn't want to be there all of time like the other groupies that wanted to do that. I finally said, "You know what? I know that I have done my very best for my governor. I know I have expended more time, willingly, and he has always been supportive of me." Then other things were happening. He was out thinking of running for President of the United States. I did support him on that. I went all the way up to Maine to support him, and you paid your own. That definitely did not come out of state government. But I felt now that his attention were being geared where I necessarily wouldn't want to go. If he were to become President, I didn't want to be in Washington. I'll let Washington to other people. There were changes that I felt that I no longer□and I don't say this negative, but just honestly saying, "No, I don't think I can be as effective." Because I honestly feel that in all my jobs, if I feel I no long can do the best, I do leave them, in a positive way. I say, "I've given my best. I now think that I cannot contribute as much as I should." Part of it was my upraising. You work what you earn. You earn what you work. In other words, you're not just there to get a check. You earn your check. That was what I was trained to do, and I didn't feel that I could contribute to that other aspect of his political objectives.

So I did ask to resign, and people thought, "You're crazy. You're at the Governor's Office." The governor did not accept my resignation right away. He didn't want me to resign, but I really felt that I knew myself. I have to always be true to me, and I felt I could now. I think I had helped him the most that I could, and he had really been really good to me and that I was going to leave in a positive way, because I don't think that I felt comfortable in the new trend. I wanted to be productive, and I probably would have stayed longer if different□I thought he could have still run again for governor, and I still thought that I could have then played a role. But at that time I did, and I just thought of this logically, not□you know. But things did become□when the cabinet, the women in the cabinet, didn't come to the Chicana Issues Conference, that was a big disappointment. That was a big disappointment. Maybe I should have gone to Jerry and said, "Jerry, I want you to ask the women in the cabinet to attend." I didn't do that. Maybe I should have done that, but then it would have been a forced situation. I had known them, I had worked with them, so why did they not come? So I said, "Well, maybe I have to face that in certain things I'm not as effective." Or maybe I always kept thinking it was that he had been so supportive of me that creates (Spanish phrase). It's a given, unfortunately. So I said, "Well, you know, I better go while I'm still able to do some other things."

That's when he appointed me to the Public Employment Relations Board, which was a full-time job. It was an independent board, and it dealt with what I started way back when employees didn't have collective bargaining. Now this board was the one that was created as a result of public employees having collective bargaining rights. So I became like□I was a judge. It was a quasi-judicial board. There was five of us on the board, and we adjudicated grievances from employees against education employers and vice versa. So, therefore, I was making decisions. I had six attorneys that worked with me that analyzed the cases and then I would make decisions on them. Then it overlapped one year into Deukmejian, and so I decided that in order to me to get reappointed, which they sort of made those□it was indirectly told that if I became a Republican I could possibly get reappointed. Of course I said, "No, thank you." It was a nice pay, it was a nice thing, but, no, no, thank you. So that ended in 1981, my adventure in state government. But I felt that I did all I could do during that era. I really felt I did my very best to make sure that the system and the bureaucracy that the establishment did include us in. It's not an easy one, and sometimes you're liked and sometimes you're disliked, and sometimes people□we're all human and we all want to be liked, but I know that there were some people who really did not like me because of the issues I was pushing. But I felt comfortable

because I felt I was doing the right thing. By then I didn't have any relatives that worked in state government, so I didn't have any vested interest. I really was dealing with how we were going to integrate the people. So no one would have accused me of, "Oh, there's a conflict of interest here. Irene's doing this because she's this or that." They couldn't.

I tried not to get publicity for what I was doing, because I knew that the minute it was known, those that were enemies of affirmative action, I would have been a target. It would have been an injustice, not for me but for things I was trying to accomplish. So I did my thing. If I got acknowledged by the press, that was fine. If I didn't, I had no problems with it. One of the things that our beloved Mario Obledo did do, he courted the public, the news, and as a result of that, he was very targeted and unjustly criticized. The same thing happened to Herman Mencias (phonetic), who became the director of Department of Motor Vehicles. The minute that then your enemies would come and just grab you. So I learned a lot about politics at that level, and that's something that we need to get more and more of, are people to know systems works, how whenever you make a decision, what the consequences are, and not to be afraid to make decisions that are just, that you know morally you should stand up for. That's what we need more and more of us to do, stand up for the things that are not right. I could tell you many a story where this elected official is nobody touches the elected officials, but he did a wrong, and we do not address that. We do not address supervisors who want you to vote for a dead sheriff because they don't want the Chicano candidate to win. We do not stand up against a good-old-boy progressive who did not do X, Y, Z that benefit our community. We have to keep our alignment. Let's say we're progressive and we support progressive candidates, those also, they're accountable to us too. We support the ideas that they represent and the programs we do, but somehow when it comes to Latinos they may not be the best.

We can educate them, hopefully, without being confrontational. Many of them do then, they understand the issue. For those that don't, I don't think we should support them, and I think we should do what other groups do. If John Blow X group political alignment does not meet the needs of Ethnic Y in it, and they're dissatisfied, they hold him accountable, and they're not afraid. Why? Fear is our greatest enemy. Fear is our greatest enemy. If we are afraid, we weaken ourselves. We do not advance our community. As long as we know that it's right, that we have that right to grieve, sometime that's the frustrating thing I face.

ESPINO:

What did you decide to do after the eighties? What were some of your issues that you were working on?

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TOVAR:

When I came back, I was really exhausted, and I was exhausted because I really did work almost 7/24. The only thing I came home was to sleep. I would get up the next morning and do it, but to me it was an adventure. I'm telling you. Even though I was exhausted, it was a good exhausted. So I decided to come back and take it a little bit easy. But at that time I became very ill and I had to have some surgery. So that put me off for a couple of years. But then I went back and I worked in what actually became the executive director of LACA, the Latin American Civic Association, which I had been one of its founders. The reason I came into it was just I never, never, never in my mind ever thought that what I had been one of the founders of, I would eventually become executive director. Never, because whatever I have ever had a part in forming or being a founder, it's because of (Spanish phrase), because there's nothing wrong with you wanting a job, but I've never thought of it that way.

But one day I opened the L.A. Times and I saw in the headlines that the Latin American Civic Association was under investigation for misappropriation of funds, and it was a shocker. It was a shocker. My first thought, "Oh, here comes the establishment that is doing us in," because we were the only Latino organization in San Fernando that dealt with the needs of the poor in the Latino community. It was founded in actually 1962, but we really ended up becoming a nonprofit organization in 1965 when we became the administer of the Head Start Program, which are federal funds. I think I've discussed that before. So at that time, at the time that the headlines came it, it was saying that it was $800,000 in debt, in the red, that there had been misappropriation and abuse of funds and many, many, a whole list of violations, federal violations. So to make a long story short, I gathered other founders and we met with LACOE, which is Los Angeles City Education Board, and we negotiating how we were to save the agency, because it would have closed the agency, and it would have closed somewhere around 1,200 children, low-income children in the San Fernando Valley. We negotiated that, one, we had to replace the executive director; two, we had to reconstitute the board because it was no longer functioning as a board; three, we had to pay back the 800,000; too, we had to put all the rules and regulations back in place, and we had to balance the budget.

Well, we can do it. We can do it. However, we never thought, or at least I didn't, that it would be so difficult to find an executive director, with that kind of notoriety. So we had made a commitment to LACOE that we were going to straighten all those things out. So the first thing we were able to do is we did reconstitute a board, a legitimate board, because on the board he had his (Spanish word). He had self-interest groups that were related to him. It was a shamble, so we reconstituted the board. Then we were put on an daily audit. Someone from the county was always there, every single day, what was happening, how we were taking care of our commitment. So I was the only one at that time that wasn't working, because I was really recovering from my long illness. We couldn't get an executive director, and here we were in trouble because we had made those commitments. Then they approached me, and I said, "Well, no. You've got to try harder." Finally I made a deal. I said, "I will be the temporary executive director, but you must aggressively recruit a permanent director. I don't anticipate being the director," because that wasn't what I was thinking of doing. So, "Oh, yes, yes, we will." So ten years

later, I was still the director because we weren't able to find someone to take the task. What I really did is recreate a new agency. I really had to reinvent a new agency. It was very strict. We end up paying our debt. We ended up creating a new agency, a new personnel system. There was no—I mean, the files of the employees were on the floor. They were all over. We were in a building that was infested with cockroach and smelly and all that kind of stuff. What save us was the earthquake, because the building was so old that it was not occupiable, so I negotiated a contract for a new building.

I really felt that it showed that the previous director had no respect for our community. We were getting $10 million a year for Head Start. To live and to have our employees work in a cockroach-infested little building that the carpet had masking tape, that it didn't have a computer system, I said, "You know what? Our community has a dignity." We moved into a building that was a very nice building. Everybody who ever came to it were really proud. I said, "I want people to feel positive when they come in." We're dealing with people with limited resources. We've got to give hope to people when they come in, that they feel that, "Hey, they respect us enough that they have a nice building, they have a nice conference room," the niceties of a regular business. That was just so-called the cosmetic part, but it was a very important cosmetic thing. But then we hired new people who were really more skilled and more bilingual, and we did make changes. The problem is that that executive director never forgave us for removing him, because the board is the only one that could remove an executive director, not the funding source. So that, he never forgave, but he had violated all those rules. He had hired his son, his brother, his two wives, his former wife, his present wife, his son's girlfriend. I mean, there was so much conflict of interest and there was so many violations. For example, one nurse, we had to have a full-time nurse. I understand that he couldn't find a full-time nurse, because I even had trouble on that. But she would come only on Saturdays, sign out certain form that only a registered nurse can, and paid her full as if she was working five days a week, and yet she had another job with the county. That's in violation. You cannot do that kind of thing.

That's just a little example, but there were a thousand other ones that it took us so many years to correct and constantly being monitored, fiscally being monitored. I didn't mind it, because we were honest and we wanted to do the right thing. At the end of it in 2005, we ended up having some—actually starting in '03 when we finally, I guess, he must have—who helped us in what was to happen was that Bush was being very, very—he wanted to get rid of Head Star, so he started throwing a lot of tests that we had to do immediately, and we had to retrain our teachers, and they were being pulled off. Then he made—which one of the good things is that he did one, and I even supported that even before I came, that our Head Start teachers had to have more of an education. At that time they only needed twenty-six units of early childhood education, got a certificate from the Department of Education, and they could teach. Well, they needed other skills. They needed it, and so the push was now to get them to get their A.A. and their B.A. and then their master's. They even provided us with funds so that they would pay their education. There was resistance from those employees because they were people that were hired way back in 1965. They were older women. They were poor women themselves, and they felt (Spanish phrase), you know, that thinking (Spanish phrase). A lot of them were the sole supporters of their families, even though they were older women. Here again, we had actually poor women who were working in Head Start because we didn't control the salaries. We had to go by the wages that were mandated to us.

So that kept the employees in an upheaval, uncomfortable, unbalanced. Okay, now we take you out because now you got to learn how to do the testing for the kids. In the past, early childhood education children were not tested. There were other ways you would observe them how they do certain things, never test. All of a sudden moms and children were being tested, so there was another—then they didn't do like, "Oh, by year 2000 the children, you should put this test in place." No. Within six months, within a year, you had to do it, so you were taking people in and out. It developed instability, a sense of insecurity. Then the union, which was the leadership came from the employees, had the same fears, so they started questioning us instead of that these were rules that were mandated to us. It became a very contentious time, and we were the target. We were the immediate target. They couldn't go to Washington and hit over there the ones that were doing that, so we became the target. But the pride that I have is that at the end, after all these problems, all these accusations they made, every single audit that came, we were in compliance. That was a key thing, and I often said—the auditor sometimes would come to me and said, "Irene, I apologize but we have to respond to every allegation that happens." So that was one. Bottom line is that when we ended up, our board decided not to get funded again. It was a board decision, which we could have applied. In 2005 the Head Start, national Head Start, evaluated all thirty Head Starts in the county. We were the only ones, and it came in the Daily News. We were the only ones that did not have a single deficiency. That is incredible, because it's full of regulations.

Secondly, that same year we got awarded the distinguished agency that administers the Children's Food Program from the State of California. What an irony. What an irony. By that time we were serving a lot. We had twenty-five of those schools. I'm very proud of what we did. Again, one of the reasons that I did was to counteract the stereotype that Chicanos cannot manage public funds, the image that the previous director had created, hitting the L.A. Times, hitting the Daily News. I said, "I'm going to prove that we're not all what that image represents." And I think we accomplished that. It was hard, it was again a lot of work, but it was something that I was proud of that I did. So that, I think, is something that I always will feel a sense of pride, that we did. We created a new agency. Our children were served well. I used that $10 million a year. I bought them the best playground, the best books. No teacher could complain they didn't have supplies. They didn't have to put it out of their pocket. We made sure that the teachers, our staff, had full health benefits. We made sure that they had vacation. I mean, I redid the whole benefit for the employees, because these were the people that we wanted to be upwardly mobile. I made sure that we worked with the community college and the state university to make sure that it was easier for them to come and to get their education, and many of them got not only their A.A., but their B.A., and when we left, they were en route to getting their master's. If I'm given the opportunity, I will do my very best to fulfill that mission and hopefully even doing more than what it asked. I don't want to just meet the minimum. I always want to see how we can surpass that and do better. In that, I feel, my life—I'm human and I'm sure I've made a lot of mistakes, and I know that some people will not like me, but I am also very grateful to god and to those that have been increasingly supportive of me for what I have done. I never take anything for granted. I don't take any acknowledgement lightly, and it fulfills my life. It has made me a happy person in that way.

But I always caution us that we should always keep our eyes open and watch how things are floating, because the waves come and go. You better be careful when it starts coming, that you better push it back to make sure you protect what you've worked for so hard for the

community.

ESPINO:

That's beautiful. I think that's a great place to end the interview. That's wonderful.

TOVAR:

Thank you.

ESPINO:

Is there anything else, maybe something that you want to say before we stop, something that we didn't talk about?

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TOVAR:

I'm sure I have left many things out, because I started off□well, I was even active when I was in high school. I was part of the student-body government. Hopefully I haven't not given credit to many people that played a role in my life and who I benefit as a result of their role. I never want to be ungrateful. I know that I'm sure that I have forgotten a lot of things because as I have been working with you on this, oh, my god, I forgot that, and I'm sure I have left out a lot of things. Hopefully, they will not think that because I thought it was not important but maybe because of my memory, my memory lapse.

But I caution the next generation, the present generation and the next generation. Maybe that's my greatest concern right this minute. Because I've said it before, but I'll repeat it as my last statement on this project, and that is that we are in very, very sensitive grounds, that if we do not play an active role on how we're going to survive this economic crisis, we will go back. We will lose the ground that we had lost for our future generation, that whatever's being decided this minute, if it is not inclusive, if it undermines that potential of our community, whether it's the young or the old, because we're a young population, the medium. But there are people that are on the other sides, the older Latino, and we of my generation now are senior citizens, and we do have some needs that we need to address. But we're always thinking of the majority, which is that young generation. But the old as well as the young now and the future is at stake right now. All of us who in some way serve in some capacity that can oversee or review or question where we are going to be in this economic crisis, that could lead us back to having to do a lot of work to recover the losses. It's not only for us as Chicanos, and I say that because we have figures that say we're the most needy, but all of us are facing that same problem. I don't want those that have benefited of that movement and now are professionals and our kids now can go to private schools, etc., that we feel so comfortable that it won't impact us. But whatever impact, the majority of our community impacts us. We may not think of it, but if you really think about it, if there are more and more Latinos that are poor, we will be disfranchised, and we'll lose many of the things we thought. I can't emphasize how seriously I think of that, and I'm always hopeful that we will survive. (Interruption)

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TOVAR:

So that's my concern, Virginia. That's my very serious concern. Maybe I'm not in tune to everything, and I know there are changes right now. As a matter of fact, next week I'm going to San Diego, and I'm going to San Diego to the Democratic State Convention. In it we're going to recognize Chicanos and Chicanas who have been elected. We're going to be looking at Chicanos who are as a result of the 2000 Census that now we've created new seats that are going to be vacant and therefore a better chance for Latinos to run. In it I want to basically remind them, because I'll have a role in one of the programs, one of them which happens to be how do we get more Chicanas to get appointed and elected to state government, because, interestingly enough, we comprise a little over 13 percent of the legislature's representative. Of that, Latinas make 2.3 percent. So that means we're still underrepresented, and women have a tendency to really look more closely on issues. I really believe. We've given life. We're concerned about children, and not that men are not, but we have a deeper understanding of that need. So I hope we do get more Chicanas, but I want to make sure they're Chicanas that have that gut feeling for justice, that gut feeling for doing the right thing, and being outspoken on it. Obviously, I want them to have the skills on how do you work the political arena, but that they know how to advocate it in a way that they can get results.

Also, too, that this is a presidential year, and what I hope is that we will give ourself the value that we can play. Many people talk about it, the political pundits, of how influential we will be, but what then? What then? So we get out the vote. There's no doubt that Obama made it because we were there for him. There's no doubt that Jerry Brown made it because we were there. There's no doubt I can rattle down a whole bunch of politicians that are not Chicanos that got there. But what after that? How do we follow up and make sure that they do produce, like they do for other groups? We know there's other groups that if they so much start feeling uncomfortable, hey, that politician comes. I do know the vote counts, but I also know we're going more and more Latinos who can also pay the bill, that are giving generous donations to elected official, and that's the other part of the political equation and so that they also should hold them accountable in terms of producing for the community. There's a Jerry Brown who heard Alex Garcia say, "I will endorse you, but you've got to appoint someone to the State Personnel Board." Where are those other Jerry Browns? I want to see more Jerry Browns. They can be female and male. They can be other minorities, too, because now and more we're all over. But what are we getting back for that? So those are my concerns, and hopefully I can remind as a senior citizen activist (Spanish phrase), maybe I can remind them that they've got to come up and up to the plate.

ESPINO:

Right. Great. I'm going to stop it here then. Thank you so much. (End of February 6, 2012 interview)