Civil Rights History Project
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Interviewee: Mateo Camarillo

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Interviewer: David Cline

Videographer: John Bishop

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START OF RECORDING

Female 1: From the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

David Cline: Good morning. This is David Cline from the history department at Virginia Tech for the Civil Rights History Project of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Library of Congress. Today, we are here in San Diego, California, and this project is being recorded, as I said, for the Civil Rights History Project. We have with us Guha Shankar of the Library of Congress, and behind the camera is John Bishop of Media Generation and UCLA. Today, we have the great pleasure of being with Mr. Mateo Camarillo, and I will ask you, sir, if you could--just as a first--the only time that I'll coach you at all today is if you could introduce yourself in a full sentence. "I am." Or, "My name is." And, where and when you were born.

Mateo Camarillo: My name is Mateo Camarillo. It's a great honor to be a party to this project, because that's what America is all about; the contribution of all its elements that make up this great society. I was actually born in Mexico in Tijuana, which is adjacent--sharing the same ecosystem with San Diego. I was born the year World War II started. 1941. So, I'm a Mexican citizen by birth. My mother was a US citizen. During the war, she was involved in the war effort, working at Convair, making planes between nine bombers and working in the tuna factory. San Diego has [a] large tuna factory, especially in Barrio Logan--located in Barrio Logan. We lived in Tijuana until 1950 when we immigrated. I have a brother and two sisters, and we all immigrated in 1950 and lived in San Diego ever since.

DC: Can you tell me just a little bit more about your family background and the role that that played in your life as you started to develop a sense of who you were?

MC: My father was a Mexican by birth. He was from northern Mexico in Nuevo León. My mother and her family have roots from Mexico, but they immigrated in the early--at the beginning of the century. So, my mom, Rafina, was born in Encanto, which is a community in San Diego. They met in Encanto where she lived. They were actually neighbors, but my father moved back to Mexico and Tijuana. That's where we were born. The four of us--my brother and my two sisters--we were born in Tijuana, but my mother grew up in Encanto. She had two brothers that served in World War II, and actually died in fighting for our country--our [inaudible] country. So, that's, basically, being born and coming to

this country. Eventually, after graduating from college, I volunteered to serve in the armed forces, because we were involved in the battles in Southeast Asia in Vietnam and so forth. I felt obligated to pay back for what I had earned--the opportunities to be here. So, I served in the US Army.

DC: So, when you first settled in the US as a small child, can you tell me about that process of becoming an American, living in the US for the first time and speaking English and what the school system was like for a young Spanish-speaker at that time?

MC: Sure. There didn't exist such a thing as bilingual education. So, when we immigrated, I was in the second grade in Tijuana. So, they gave me a test, which, obviously, was in English. I failed it miserably, because I didn't know English. All the classes [5:00] were. Fortunately, it was a very small school, and the grades were two grades per room. So, we would all huddle around and ask in Spanish, "What did she say--the teacher? Que dijo?" And we'd, among ourselves, try to make sense out of what the teacher was saying. It was difficult, because we didn't know English, but most of the students didn't speak English either, because it was a farm labor community made up of immigrants.

DC: So, how did you survive? How did you move forward?

MC: It was a struggle. It was a struggle. We did the best we could. Fortunately, I had a teacher who invited me to have an ice cream with her after school. Then, I realized that teachers are actually human beings.

DC: Yeah. Just talking about being in the schools as a young--.

MC: Initially, they thought we were mentally retarded, because we couldn't communicate, but we eventually, little by little, learned a few words and were able to--especially on the playground, where it comes more natural to communicate with English-speaking students. That's how we learned, by trial and error, so to speak.

DC: Now, did you confront difficulties from the Anglo students who were there as well?

MC: Initially, but they learned, especially on the playground, that we were actually very good. So, they wanted us on their team. So, that's how we learned to be able to communicate with each other, even though, initially, there was some animosity. We got over it as we demonstrated we were human beings just like they were.

DC: So, what was the racial geography of San Diego at that time in terms of where people lived? Were things very much separated or not?

MC: Yes. When we immigrated, my mother got a job in Mission Valley, which is agricultural. Mission Valley is close to the first mission built by Junípero Serra about the San Diego River. It was agricultural land. Dairy and agricultural. Most of the workers were immigrants. So, the transition--we had a support system--other immigrants. So, we phased in learning a little bit at a time. I started work at age ten when we immigrated. In the work environment, [I] also spoke--learned English--beyond school. So, that's how we gradually learned English. It wasn't the other way around. English speaking students didn't learn Spanish. That

would have been good, though, because we both would have two languages, and we could communicate freely.

DC: That would take a long time before anything like that was thought of. How about where you lived--in the neighborhood where you lived, was [it] an immigrant neighborhood or were there people who had been here a long time? What was the neighborhood like? The neighborhood where your family eventually lived in San Diego.

MC: We immigrated in 1950, and I was ten years old. In the Mission Valley area, there were a lot of immigrants because of the labor required in the farming and dairy industries. So, that was a safety net, to be able to gradually learn English. You learn another language by practice. Just like later years, I was stationed in Europe, and I travelled all over Europe and learned languages of other countries where I visited.

DC: I'm interested in how you defined yourselves when you were young in terms of what did you call yourself? Would you use the term Chicano, Mexican, Mexican American? How did your family or those around you talk about who you were?

MC: Well, we were basically identified as Mexican. Others defined us. We accepted the definition, because we were from Mexico. So, we were Mexican. Gradually, [we] evolved to Mexican Americans, because we were in [the] United States. So, [we] evolved to Mexican American, [10:00] because we were struggling to become successful participants in this great country. The term Chicano evolved several years later. Actually, it was a negative connotation that

was more of a slur, but it actually was adopted as a proud term for those that were struggling to gain the same rights as other citizens in this country.

DC: Now, in your schooling, at a young age, but then into high school, were you learning about your own people at all? What was the schooling that you were getting here in the California state system?

MC: No. There was no information about Mexico or Mexicans. It was independent of schools, where I stayed connected by visiting Tijuana and other cities in Mexico to continue being connected, but we transitioned over time to the larger San Diego community, which is majority English-speaking. The thing that, for me, made it easier in terms of transition, I was pretty good in sports. Through sports and the playground is where I started developing leadership skills. I was selected in charge of the junior patrols, which is a crossing guard, so that we control traffic, so that other students could cross the street. So, that evolved into--plus, leadership skills in the playground--so, that actually gave you pride and encouragement that you were just as good as the next person.

DC: So, if you could just walk me through the chronology of high school and what you did after high school and your service in the army.

MC: As I mentioned, in elementary school, I was pretty good in the playground. Actually, in junior high, there was a coach that wanted to start a team for cross country runners in junior high. He asked me to come out and try, and I did, and I was pretty good at it. I was actually the champion of our grade in ninth grade, when we graduated. Then, when I graduated and went to high school, the coach asked me to come out and run for the track team and the cross country

team. I did, and I [did] later, all years I was there. So, that really was the area where I built self-confidence and eventually evolved to be able to learn English, because I was very active in sports. I lettered, and when I graduated from high school, I got scholarships because of my involvement.

DC: So, what happened after high school?

MC: Well, as I indicated, I got two scholarships. One was from my alma mater, Hoover High School. I got a scholarship. Then a second scholarship I got from the LA Gardens Woman's Club. LA Gardens was the adjacent community [inaudible] where I was there. With those two scholarships, I went to college. Nobody in my family had ever gone to college, or even graduated from high school. That was new territory, but I was also [in] the comfort of having three jobs. I was occupied both in sports and in education and in three different jobs.

DC: Which college did you attend?

MC: San Diego State. I graduated in four years. That was at the time when the Vietnam War was going on strong. While I was in college, President Kennedy was the commencement speaker in 1962. I had been very interested [15:00] in President Kennedy. He had, actually, an outreaching into the Hispanic community there called Viva Kennedy Clubs. I got involved in the Viva Kennedy Club in San Diego. Then, when he came and gave the very inspirational graduation speech, that even motivated me more to get involved in civic life and various aspects of civic engagement: voter registration, helping others become citizens. I became a citizen at age twenty-one. I was eligible, because my mother was a US citizen. I became a naturalized citizen at age twenty-one where I was

eligible to apply. I applied, and I became a citizen. So, as a citizen, [I] became more involved in the civic life of our communities.

DC: So, you talked about Kennedy. Were there other particular moments that started to point you towards involvement?

MC: Well, that was the entry point to getting involved. Then, as I was involved in sports, I started getting involved in other aspects of college life. Although, I lived at home and worked, I still was participating in various civic activities, basically, through voter registration, getting more familiar with how government worked, and the partnership between the citizens and our elected representatives. I got more familiar with that process and have been involved in the civic life ever since.

DC: So, were there voter registration drives going on in the city at that time?

MC: Yes. Well, the Viva Kennedy Club was beginning. Then, subsequently, I started a voter registration project in San Diego connected to the Southwest Council La Raza Southwest Voter Registration Project.

DC: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

MC: Yes. It was the first multicultural voter registration project in San Diego where we included African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, because many of them were not participating. They were either, A, not citizens, or not involved in the civic life. So, we reached out to them to become more broader and more effective, because we're all on the same boat, and we found out that that's a good way to improve our lives and our communities.

We were more successful by including others in similar situations like Asian Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans.

DC: So, about what year was this [that] you were working with that La Raza project?

MC: This was from 1962 from the Kennedy Clubs on. The reason we got involved with lots of Native Americans [is] there are fourteen Native American tribes in San Diego County. So, they're a very significant element of our communities.

DC: When you graduated from college, is that when you went into the service?

MC: Yes. Many of my friends actually left the country. They went to Canada or Mexico, because they didn't want to--Vietnam was a very unpopular war, especially with young college-aged folks that were eligible to be drafted. There was a mandatory draft. They didn't want to serve in that, but I felt obligated to serve to demonstrate that I was grateful for the opportunities to participate in our civic life. I served. I volunteered in the army. There was spinal meningitis in California where the training was, so I was sent to Georgia. I became more familiar with African Americans, being in Georgia and South Carolina.

DC: So, what year is this that you went in?

MC: This is in 1965.

DC: Okay. Was this your first experience of the American South? What did they make of you--a Latino friend from Los Angeles or from San Diego?

MC: Not much. When we finished basic training, we got a three-day pass to be able--so, we went into [20:00] Charleston in South Carolina, because the closest there--which is on the Atlantic Coast, and we enjoyed--it was just like the Pacific. Beautiful. We were in a restaurant. We were waiting to be served. We waited several hours enjoying the views of the Atlantic Ocean and so forth. Then, we finally went looking for the manager and find out what was taking so long to get a meal. We were informed--there was three of us on this. Myself, a Mexican American, an African American from Georgia, and a Puerto Rican, because there were a lot of Puerto Ricans in the army, also, on the East Coast. So, the three of us were waiting. Then, I finally was asked to go check what was going on. I asked for the manager and asked when I talked to him--I [said], "We've been waiting several hours to be served. When are we going to be served?" He informed me, "You're not even going to be served." I couldn't believe that. I [said], "Did you run out of food?" He [said], "You're not being served." That was my first experience in real, blatant discrimination. Three minorities: Mexican American, African American, Puerto Rican, couldn't be served.

We experienced similar situations in Atlanta. We went to Atlanta one evening. There were night clubs. So, we tried to enter. We couldn't enter. They said we had to have [a] membership card. We subsequently learned that you buy those at the front door if you're the right ethnic flavor [?]. So, that was my experience in the South.

DC: Had you experienced any kind of discrimination like that in California? Not at that level.

MC: No.

DC: So, how about in the military itself? How were relations between different ethnic groups?

MC: Well, no, the army, we're all in it together. No, it was very, very integrated. [A] large number of, as I say, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Ricans. We got along, because we're in it together. We're on the same side. So, no, I didn't experience. Also, because I was also involved in sports, we developed a track team. We called ourselves the Road Rats. So, sports breaks across all barriers. It's athletic ability. I was pretty good at it, so we got along very well. There was no issue with the different ethnic groups in the army, because, as I say, we all believe we're on the same side.

DC: How about in basic training? Was there anything from the sergeants or anything?

MC: No. One of the things you learn real quick in the army is, you take orders. You're not in a position to argue. So, the transition in the army, especially basic training, we were in the learning mode. Basically, we took orders. So, it was not a challenge or difficult. Although, the majority of the officers were Anglo, and the majority of the soldiers were minorities. That's a fact of life at that time.

DC: So, when you got your orders, where were you sent?

MC: Pardon?

DC: When you got your orders after training, where were you sent?

MC: Fortunately--most of my peers, fellow soldiers, were sent to Vietnam. I was fortunate. There was too many--what you call green or rookie soldiers dying. So, they changed the mixture of who was being sent to Vietnam with experienced soldiers--more experienced, to have better survival rates. I was fortunate to be sent to Europe as an infill for those that were in Europe being sent to Vietnam. So, I was sent to Germany. That was a tremendous experience. I had never been to Europe. [25:00] I was in the Armored Battalion. I was infantry in training, but then, when I [was] sent to Europe, where they needed the backfill was in the armored division. I was sent to the Fourth Army. I was the training office for the Fourth Armor Battalion, and I did my job as a training officer--one week's work in one day. So, they needed to find other things for me to do. The children of soldiers don't have much stimulation or things to do. So, most of the Boy Scouts in Europe are dependents--children of soldiers. They asked me to lead the Boy Scouts of America in Europe and asked me if I would accept that. I knew nothing about Boy Scouts, but I was willing to learn.

I was named the scoutmaster of Europe--the Transatlantic Council in Europe. Fortunately, since I was able to do my job in one day for a whole week, I was able to travel all over Europe taking kids through all the countries in Europe, because all the military bases had Boy Scout facilities. We travelled all over Europe. My two years in Europe were very enjoyable, because I could do the work very easy and then enjoy working with--. As matter of fact, being scoutmaster and working with children and families is what led me, when I got released--when I finished my two years and came back, I came back to San

Diego. Since I had enjoyed working with families, I joined the Welfare Department to continue working with families in San Diego as a civilian.

DC: So, you're back in San Diego and have been hired by the welfare department. Can you tell me a little bit about that position and the issues that were facing San Diego, and especially Latinos in San Diego at that time?

MC: When I joined the Welfare Department, I was a rarity. There were very few Spanish speaking social workers. Be it Anglo or Mexican or African American, they didn't speak Spanish. There was a large number of Spanish speaking families that applied for services. They paid taxes just like everybody else, but weren't getting services, because there [were] no workers available that were bilingual. So, that quickly led me to organizing, not only within the welfare department, but with probation and the sheriff's department and other departments, and then outside the county to recruit more people, because the need was so--I had English-speaking social workers like me that spoke only English. They had what's called a caseload. How many families they did--sixty. I had 600. Now, that was totally unfair. I couldn't service them right. My job was to try to help them become independent, so they could be off public assistance. That was my goal--is to have people be independent and self-sufficient. But, they have to know how to apply for a job, where the job market was. Basically, counseling and advising them of how they could succeed, but you couldn't do it with 600 families. It was just not doable. So, I increased my efforts in recruiting and trying to--so, I formed an organization, because you can't do it by yourself.

So, I formed an organization called Trabajadores de La Raza. Workers for the people. Other social workers throughout the United States were forming Trabajadores de La Raza chapters. So, we formed a national organization of Trabajadores de La Raza. We connected with each other to help each other [30:00] to build more bilingual social workers, be they Hispanic or Anglo, so that their services could be provided to people that needed the services, so they could become independent and self-sufficient.

DC: Now, did that organization work within the city organizations or outside or together with?

MC: Well, the San Diego chapter worked in San Diego. San Diego County--all eighteen cities in San Diego, not just one city. We connected with other chapters--Los Angeles, San Jose, in Texas, San Antonio, Houston, and the East Coast. So, we formed a national, and we helped each other in these various cities.

DC: But, did you work independently of the federal or city programs or did you work with welfare department?

MC: We worked independent within San Diego County.

DC: But, working with the welfare department or outside of the city system?

MC: Well, a large number of the members work within the County, because that's who provides--has a responsibility of the municipal governments to provide social services. The city doesn't do it, but we did connect with city folks. We needed recruits and participants that were bilingual. We did this after hours.

We, obviously, didn't do it as we were getting paid to do our work as social workers or probation officers or sheriff's deputies.

DC: So, it was an addition to--. How did you fund these efforts? It must have taken a lot of funding.

MC: Yes. We did it through membership dues, initially. Then, actually, in college, I learned grant writing. I was a community organizer and was able to develop funding through various sources of foundations--Ford Foundation, government, National Institute of Mental Health--to be able to supplement whatever we could do privately. One of the initial successful efforts that we did in San Diego is that we met with public officials and demanded that there be more bilingual social--as a matter of fact, as an incentive to get more bilingual social workers, we were very successful in convincing elected officials--the county board supervisors, for example, to pay a bonus on top of the salary--ten percent of the salary as a bonus for those that spoke Spanish, because they were actually doing twice the work, because they spoke two languages. We convinced them of the need and the reward for doing twice the work. That passed [at] the county level. With that success, we approached the city and did the same thing and got a bilingual pay bonus for city workers. Then, we went to the larger employer in San Diego at that time. We're talking about the early 1970s--was the utility San Diego Gas & Electric company. We convinced the board of directors of SDGE, San Diego Gas & Electric, to pay a bonus and got that instituted. So, the three largest employers in San Diego: the city of San Diego, the county of San Diego, and the utility company, SDGE, adopted bilingual pay.

That led me to work with the state legislature with African American and Hispanic--Richard Alatorre from Los Angeles and Mervyn Dymally--was actually from the Dominican Republic, but was resident in California. Those two-- I worked together. We established a state bilingual pay program in the late 1970s. So, we were able to apply it statewide, because it just--common sense. That's how we were able to be very successful. Then, those successes led us to other efforts to try to help the underserved communities.

DC: So, what were the big issues in the '70s that you were dealing with and trying to address--the major issues? [35:00]

MC: The major issues is being treated equally. The manifestation of how unfairness occurred was pretty obvious. The lack of services, for example, in the language that people understood, and tried to develop bilingual programs, so that there could be a transition in terms of Spanish speakers. So, we worked on all those fronts. It took a while. For example, the grand jury--the county of San Diego, they change every year who the jurors are. One year, the grand jury investigated and came up with the conclusion that bilingual education, as we were starting it, was un-American. That so angered Spanish speakers. Here we're trying to, through bilingual education, be able to participate, and they're talking us as un-American, because we're trying to learn English using bilingual education? So, we formed an ad hoc committee of fifteen different organizations and demanded that the grand jury be abolished or the jurors be replaced, because how could we be un-American by trying to participate in America by the language--

bilingual as a transition to English? So, we faced different struggles over time. Eventually, we were successful.

DC: How about other issues? You talked about education. What about employment, housing, health care. Were these all issues that were facing folks in the '70s?

MC: Especially employment. That's basic, which affects the other issues of affordability of health or--as a matter of fact, we expanded--I mentioned about bilingual services. The other is that there were no food programs for those that were either homeless or low income that couldn't make ends meet. So, we eventually convinced the board of supervisors through Trabajadores de La Raza to adopt a food program. San Diego County, of the fifty-eight counties in California, was the only one that did not have a food program. So, we convinced them to adopt a food program starting with the poorest neighborhood in San Diego County, San Ysidro, right on the border between San Diego and Mexico and Tijuana. So, we were successful through the San Ysidro Women's Club and others to convince the board of supervisors to adopt a food program. That was the beginning of broader services available to Spanish speakers.

Then, we did the same thing in the labor force in terms of trying to open up jobs for--we actually had to sue the county of San Diego. I was selected. The executive director of the Chicano Federation, which is an umbrella organization for Spanish speaking organizations in San Diego. As the executive director, obviously, it made the papers, and people--constant stream of employees came to me, to my office, asking for help, because they were facing so much

discrimination in the job market. The biggest group were coming were county employees. I, basically, took their information and, having been a county employee, I was very familiar with county government and county employment. I informed them that we'd have to take legal action; however, they risked the possibility of losing their job if there was litigation involved. I had to inform them that was a possibility. Yet, they wanted justice. [40:00] They wanted to go forward.

At that time, this was 1974. There were six Latino attorneys in town. So, I notified all six to meet with at our office, because I had so many cases that demanded fairness. I shared with them the information, because I had permission to do that. I let them know that, as I indicated, that if we moved forward with litigation that they could lose their jobs. They agreed to go forward. We went forward. And through the--civil rights, it passed. Equal opportunity employment became federal law. Under those laws, we sued the county of San Diego. It took a long time to get justice. As a matter of fact, it was the longest-lasting civil rights case in the history of the United States, but we won and opened up the opportunities at the county, which set the example where we could do the same at the city and the SDGE and in the private sector. That's how we did in terms of increasing employment opportunities.

DC: Longest lasting in terms of the lawsuit?

MC: I'm sorry.

DC: You said the longest lasting case in terms of the suit?

MC: That's correct, because it was so complicated. We actually added other groups, because they came to us. African Americans came to us. We added African Americans. Asian Americans came to us. We added Asian Americans, Filipinos. So, we had Mexican Americans, African Americans, Filipinos, Asian Americans, all the minority groups in San Diego County under our case. That's why it took a long time, because it was complicated. It included all the groups, but we won.

DC: What did you win? What changed?

MC: The county--the employers, starting with the county, had to employ minorities. At the time, before we won, before the case was filed, sixty-seven percent of all Hispanics that applied for employment were turned down. We won the right to have opportunities for people applying for jobs. How could sixty-seven percent of applicants be ineligible? So, there were artificial barriers that had to come down. That's what we won: removal of barriers and equal opportunities. That's what we won. People got jobs. That's what we won. We won beyond the county. We also did that with the city and private sector. It only was possible, because we had such a broad base, such broad support. No one could do that by themselves or even just one single group. We're all part of the same family. We're all part of the same situation and experiencing the same kinds of discrimination, if you will, or lack of opportunity. Jobs are important to the actual survival, and people deserve a right to work if they're qualified, and they were. So, that was very, very rewarding to be able to succeed like that.

DC: So, I was going to ask--we were already talking about this with the case and the coalitions with other groups. Can you talk more about the need for that and what other coalitions you created at that time?

MC: Another example of working with others, when President Nixon was running for reelection, he promoted a program called General Revenue Sharing, [45:00] which was providing funds to cities in counties with no strings attached. They could do whatever with those funds. General Revenue Sharing. Well, we were grateful that was--however, we were concerned, since local government, city and county, were not very flexible in terms of serving all the populations, especially underserved communities. So, we formed a coalition led by the Chicano Federation. I was the executive director. The chairman of the board, Dr. Alfredo Velasco, and I, and there was an Anglo coalition umbrella like the Chicano Federation that had multiple service delivery organizations under it. We teamed up. The Community Congress, which is primarily Anglo. That was the time of the hippie movement, the beach community, and young, disenfranchised Anglos. So, we had a lot in common. So, we joined forces. We travelled to Washington. The leaders of the two coalitions went to Washington to find out more about the intent of Congress and how it was supposed to work. It was, basically, to serve low-income communities, but that's not the way it was going to be implemented based on what we already knew. Initially, started out, the city wanted to fund its own projects, including units of the city, of the government. We argued that that was not the intent of Congress. It was to eliminate poverty and discrimination.

So, we got all these social service agencies in San Diego: family services, Catholic services, social services, the city and county services, and the agencies funded, as well as United Way as a private agency. Informed a little army of civilian citizens and challenged the city and the county--the governments that were using it internally. That's not the intent of Congress. They tried to redefine who would be eligible, who was a senior citizen, who was poor. Those were already defined in federal law. The Older Americans Act defined who was a senior. The War on Poverty defined who was poor or low income. So, we challenged them, and they wouldn't accept that, so we sued them. Basically, they had to walk a straight line. We were able to get, the first year, a little over five million dollars for the community organizations by passing local government. The next year, we got a little over six million. So, working together was a great experience, in terms of being able to provide for the needs of low-income seniors and so forth that was not government controlled or defined by government as to who's poor and who's a senior. That's already defined at the federal level. So, we won those battles. It was very rewarding, because that led to other battles, to being able to provide for the needs of the underserved.

DC: Now, were you aware or in touch with other Latino organizations around here? But, maybe in Los Angeles or in other places as well? I'm just curious, in terms of the Chicano or Latino communities, what kinds of ways you were involved with one another.

MC: Yes. As I mentioned, we formed Trabajadores de La Raza in San Diego, and there were other chapters being developed in other cities: Los

Angeles, San Jose, Houston, New York, Denver. So, we connected. We kept in communication [50:00] with the other chapters and were able to each share. We learned from each other, and that encouraged us to move on. The strongest group was the Spanish-speaking organizations, because that was the largest ethnic group at that time. It still is, even more so. Chicano became in more common use, and, as a matter of fact, when I left the faculty at San Diego State, I joined the staff of the Chicano Federation, which is the first Spanish-speaking organization in San Diego County that was multiply disciplined and included all Spanish-speaking organizations in San Diego. I was the executive director of the Chicano Federation. Through that organization, as well as through Trabajadores de La Raza--I was an officer of that--we connected with other organizations in the different cities, and we worked together. As a matter of fact, the strongest chapter, in addition to San Diego, was San Jose, Santa Clara County. They were working through education and to try to start a school of social work to prepare bilingual social workers. They recruited me to join the faculty to start the school of social work at San Jose. So, not only was I in communication, I was recruited, and I joined the faculty at San Jose State, because of Trabajadores de La Raza. They asked me to help them start the school of social work.

DC: When were you at San Diego State and when were you at San Jose?

MC: When I got out of the army, as I said, I was eligible for the GI educational Bill of Rights to be able to get two years of further education. I went to San Diego State on the GI Bill to get a master's degree. During that time, I was

working at the county. So, I've always did multiple jobs at the same time. While I was a student in the school of social worker getting my master's degree, that's when I was working for the county and developing Trabajadores de La Raza and so forth. When I graduated with a master's degree in social work, and community organizing was my specialty, I even trained with Saul Alinsky, who was the greatest organizer, in terms of he trained Cesar Chavez. He trained Barack Obama. He trained the founders of the National Council of La Raza. So, I applied for a Ford Foundation fellowship to go to Chicago to train under Saul Alinsky in community organizing and joined the faculty of San Jose to train organizers.

I left San Diego State when I graduated and went to San Jose to be the second in command as the coordinator for field instruction, which is fifty percent of the time with students in graduate school in schools of social work and had a pleasant two-year experience of getting that school off the ground and seeing the next generation of young leaders coming out of graduate schools. At that time, there were very few trained social workers with a master's degree in the whole country.

So, that experience was very--and, I recruited on the faculty, one of the founders of the National Council of La Raza, Herman Gallegos, who was originally from San Francisco, while he was born in San Jose in Santa Clara in the largest body in California's Salsipuedes, where Cesar Chavez--they grew up together--Cesar Chavez and Herman Gallegos. I asked Herman to join me on the faculty, which he did after he had founded the National Council of La Raza. And, Herman, I recruited him, because he had worked with many foundations: the Ford

Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation. He knew about accessing capital, especially in the private sector, as a new school. We needed more than just state funding. So, that was the other reason, because he was a good organizer, [55:00] and we needed some help in identifying sources of funding to be able to do what we wanted to do, because the state wouldn't fund what we were trying to do as a normal course of things. So, we were very successful, because of the team we put together, including Herman Gallegos.

DC: I wanted to ask, slightly related, maybe a little bit different, about--but, again, with other groups that you may have worked with. Obviously, there's different approaches in activism, sort of along a spectrum, from radical revolutionary to all the way across to working within the system. I'm wondering if you worked with other groups that had different approaches and how that went. I'm thinking of the Brown Berets who started in California. Did you work with labor unions? Did you ever have conflicts or good working relations with groups that had a slightly different approach? Some who wanted revolution now, for example. I wonder if you could comment on that.

MC: Yes. Yes. Actually, all of the above. When I was the executive director of the Chicano Federation, we were countywide. We worked with all those groups. As a matter of fact, my offices were under the Coronado Bridge. We worked with grassroots in Barrio Logan, led by my sister, Tomasa Camarillo, who was elected chairman of an organization called Chicano Park Steering Committee. They were headquartered in Barrio Logan. They, actually, were promised, the community, Hispanic community, Spanish speaking community,

was promised by the city that there'd be a park under the bridge. Well, it turned out that that promise, they were reneging, and they were going to put a highway patrol station, because it's state land under the bridge. The bridge is state funded. So, the land stayed. They were going to put a highway patrol. To us, highway patrol, police department, sheriff's department, they're police, and not very friendly in various ways. I'll give you a couple of examples, but at that point they physically, led by my sister, took over the land under the bridge and occupied it with picks and shovels--developed a park. Chicano Park. There was no parks and rec department or any city involvement. So, we physically, led by my sister, Tomasa, who's still the president of Chicano Parks Steering Committee to this day. Many of the members were artists. They saw this great surface--the pillars--and, they decided, "Hey, we're going to beautify these raw cement pillars." That was the birth of the mirrorless movement. You now drive, and you see all the pillars decorated with murals, which is the history of the Chicano movement.

My offices, when I was director of the Chicano Federation, were right there under the bridge. It was built with federal funds, and, rather than having a highway patrol, we had this facility with federal funds, and we housed multiple social services. Welfare Rights, Brown Berets, Pinto Union. Pinto in Spanish are ex-cons. We recruited government agencies and private agencies like human resources from the state of California to have an office there for employment. Information on jobs and counseling. We had the welfare department provide social workers, and we had social services provided. We did a demonstration project how social services ought to be dealt in a more humane and multicultural

way. So, we did that with mental health, also, because the mental health approach was people are crazy or have a deficit--mental health--that's not the way to approach [1:00:00] mental [health]. We did a demonstration project [on] how it should be done. As I said, we housed all various government, private, and volunteer organizations, such as the Pinto Union, such as the Brown Berets. Those were private. We all got along, because we were in the same boat. We just had different ways of doing it. But, we helped each other.

For example, one of the first persons to visit me when I was selected executive director of Chicano Federation, was the changed police chiefs. Bill Kolender was selected, and I testified in the selection in support, because he was a good human being. He was Jewish by background, but—you know, he knew the experience of discrimination. As soon as I was selected, he called me and wanted to meet. So, I met with him, and we agreed we would meet on a regular basis. We exchanged phone numbers, and we had direct contact. Didn't have to go through intermediaries or whatever. So, we could solve problems directly.

Just a couple of examples, one of them is hot pursuit. The police would run into our building, which had welfare rights, women senior citizens, women, various services to the people, and you can't have police running through your building when you're trying to provide services to people. That just scares the heck out of people. I picked up the phone and told the chief of police that was unacceptable. Without riots, without having any bullying, that ceased. Why? Because we went to lunch and we agreed it'll meet regularly, and we have access to each other via phone. The same thing happened with the mayor. The mayor, at

that time, was Pete Wilson. We met, exchanged phone numbers, and agreed to pick up the phone whenever we wanted to talk, and we'd meet every three months on a regular basis. Those kinds of lines of communication help. That's why you didn't find riots in San Diego like you had in Watts, LA, or Detroit, various other cities throughout the country. In my opinion, it was because we could pick up the phone and talk to people that could solve if you had a dispute or a quarrel.

Another example is, one Sunday evening--the police department has different divisions, and the northern division, which covers La Jolla and the more fluent communities in the North. Two officers that finished their shift at two a.m. in the morning, decided that Sunday evening that they would have some fun after their shift. They put on black gloves, went to Barrio Logan. Barrio Logan was the headquarters, two blocks from my office, the largest low rider car club in San Diego, Brown Image. Brown Image members came to my office that morning, Monday morning, to let me know what had happened at two a.m. at their headquarters. The police came and saw the lights that were working on their cars--them and their girlfriends'. They had their headquarters there on Logan Avenue. The police decided to beat the heck out of--and, they did. Not only the men, but the women. They were so angry. They came to me, and they [said], "There's going to be hell to pay." This is what happened. I immediately got on the phone, called the mayor, Pete Wilson, the chief of police, Bill Kolender. I [said], "You better get your ass down here before five o'clock. There's going to be a meeting with Brown Image. This is what happened. Your presence is required by five o'clock."

Five o'clock. We had Mayor Pete Wilson, Bill Kolender, and the city manager. There were 500 low riders and their supporters and their friends. I [said] for them to explain what had happened. Brown Image leaders spoke about what happened. There was no denial [1:05:00] from the police department, but they were readily apologizing. The chief of police apologized, "It will never happen again." The mayor, "This will never happen again." City manager, "We wanted better relations [so] that wouldn't happen." The fact that we could communicate saved a riot in San Diego.

Other very disturbing acts by the police was this was the height anti-immigrant experience, and we're right next to Tijuana, Mexico. The police had authorized taxi cab drivers to take Mexican-looking folks to immigration. That came to my attention from residents in San Ysidro. I called Bill Kolender and [said], "That's unacceptable." [It] immediately ceased. Those things wouldn't have happened if I couldn't pick up the phone and talk to somebody that could solve the problem. That's one of the differences of the city's experience versus other cities where there wasn't that kind of communication. So, yes, I did deal with folks that had different lifestyles and different methods of getting justice, but we got along, because we could solve problems. I didn't object to how they did it. That's none of my business, and they didn't object--as a matter of fact, they supported what I was doing. So, that was a very rewarding experience to be able to solve problems without violence. But, we got justice.

DC: Why do you think those individuals, you mentioned mayor Pete Wilson and the police chief--why do you think that they were amenable to talking

with you and actually open in a way that many elected officials in other places have not been? Something in the air of San Diego.

MC: The largest minority group by far were Hispanics, Latinos, Mexican Americans.

DC: So, it's the power of the vote.

MC: The number is very significant. They had to pay attention, and the doors were not opening. When people get frustrated because there aren't opportunities, things could go sideways. Public officials are not stupid. They may be prejudiced, but they're not stupid. They would rather have peaceful resolutions, even if it's on their terms, but at least, a solution that didn't include violence, because somebody's going to get hurt. Maybe, it would be them. I give them a lot of credit for having common sense, and I think that that's really why we were able to solve problems without violence.

Now, that is not to say that we wiped away discrimination or differential treatment. But we worked at it. We worked at it through the system through litigation, through negotiations, through mediation. That's an avenue that's available, and we tried that first. In our case, we were successful, and it worked.

DC: Were there times when taking to the streets was necessary as well in marches or demonstrations?

MC: Well, marches, yes. I even joined in some of those marches. Cesar Chavez came to San Diego, and I met with him and so forth. We joined the boycott. That was marches in the streets and grocery stores. So, yeah, you do demonstrations like that, but they're nonviolent in terms of attacking persons'

private property or private citizens. But, yeah, sometimes, you have to demonstrate publicly the wrongs that exist to try to correct them and bring attention from the broader community. We feel that the broader community is fair-minded, they just need information of what's going on. That was our belief, and that's what we did.

DC: Fantastic. Let me ask you when you were doing this work and, as executive director of the Chicano Federation, was that paying you a salary or were you earning money in other ways? [1:10:00] How were you keeping the bills paid for yourself?

MC: Yes, I was paid a salary. We had a staff. Obviously, the executive directors, they headed the staff. I hired other people. I didn't [do] it by myself. I had a very supportive board of directors. The Federation was unique, in that the board of directors were leaders of other organizations. So, the Federation, that's what it was, a federation of organizations. When the Federation spoke, it was speaking for all of the Spanish-speaking organizations in the town, in the county. So, it was pretty well respected. We used nonviolent ways, but we also used the political system. We knew how that worked, and we also, in addition to my salary and working with others, we also raised money through a PAC--political action committee--to help elect responsible and responsive public officials.

We participated to try to change the system, both externally and internally, and tried to enlighten. I met with all of the public officials, the heading of municipal governments--county board of supervisors. There's five supervisors in the county, and there's mayors that serve four-year terms. Some are reelected, not

all of them. I met with all the mayors since the 1970s, and the board of supervisors. We didn't have enough registered voters to elect Hispanics, so we formed advisory commissions and boards for all the elected officials: mayors, board of supervisors, work commission, state assembly members, so that we could be heard. We had input into the public officials, even though we didn't have Latino elected officials. There's only been, in the city of San Diego, for example, two Latino city council-people serving at any one time. We haven't had any Latinos on the county board of supervisors. We had to have a different avenue to be able to communicate and influence good government. That's what we did through organizations.

DC: Now, how long were you executive director of the Federation?

MC: I was there until 1976 when, after having sued the city, the state, the county--I'm not a fool. I knew that at some point—that old saying "Don't bite the hand that feeds you." Well, we were getting government grants. We were getting private money, but by suing them, that didn't make them very happy. I knew that that was short lived if I wanted to continue challenging wrongness--things that were not quite correct--that I had to have my own private source of income. In 1976, I chose to go into the private sector. I did research as to--I knew nothing about renting a business. What I had experience [with] is selling newspapers, chewing gum, picking up recycled materials that could be recycled. That was my experience--shining shoes. That was my experience in the private sector. I had to learn more about how to earn a better living than shining shoes. The number one industry as I did my research was the food industry. Within the

food industry, for people like me that new zero about how to run a business, I decided that franchising was the way to learn, because you're actually implementing a method, a system that already is [1:15:00] successful. The most successful within the food and franchising business was McDonalds. I focused on McDonalds, even though I knew the founder of Jack in the Box, a friend of my mine, Dick Silberman. As a matter of fact, I have a picture with him where he stole my hat, and he's wearing it, and I'm making fun of him stealing my hat. We were friends, but that was an original chain, small chain. Nothing compared to McDonalds.

I decided to apply for a franchise for McDonalds. They turned me down twice and said I wasn't qualified. I wasn't agreeable in accepting their turn-down. I visited existing franchisees, and I looked and [said], "I can do a better job than they're doing. Why I'm not--" The third time I asked the regional manager of McDonalds for a meeting, and I said, "I'm bringing some guests." I invited the US congressman from this area, the city councilman from this area, board of supervisors from this area, state assemblyman from this area. Basically, the elected officials who I knew, because I'd been dealing with them--to this meeting with the regional manager, knowing that restaurants need over a dozen government permits, sound for the drive-thru, signage, lighting, size, parking, health, over a dozen different requirements interfacing with government. Who better to have than representatives of the people that even McDonalds has to deal with?

At the start of the meeting--the general manager's name is Dean. Dean Canterbury [?]. I [said], "Dean, before we start, I'd like to introduce the people around here, so that you know who you're talking to." I went by each public official representative. He about fell out of his chair. I [said], "We just have one simple question. Could you explain to these good folks why I'm not qualified to be a McDonalds franchisee?" "Who said you're not qualified? You start tomorrow." That's how I got into business. The rest is history. From there, I branched off. I applied for radio stations. I owned half a dozen radio stations. I owned other restaurants. I started other businesses. I started Aztec Nut and Bolt, marketing promotional companies. I've been incorporated over a dozen nonprofits and over a dozen for profits.

So, basically, to be versatile is, you don't put all your eggs in one basket. So, I got involved, but the initial start in business was this McDonalds franchisee, but I continued my civic involvement. As a matter of fact, I had more leverage and more influence. The secretary of state for the state of California came to me, March Fong Eu. She wanted to do a statewide voter registration project and asked me. She wanted to have the private sector participate. I agreed with the secretary of state to offer free French fries and talked to my fellow franchisees, other franchisees to participate. We gave free French fries to people that showed that they had voted with that little button. I subsequently, by people that were sore losers, [was] accused of trying to influence elections, which is illegal, obviously. I was rewarding people for voting. I didn't tell them how to vote. That's not my job. My job was to try to increase voter participation. That's what I did. I had to

defend myself. It was very rewarding to be get in a statewide project with the government with the secretary of state to get more people registered to vote.

That's one of the things that is a barrier for participation of underserved communities. Hispanics, African Americans, [1:20:00] Asians. Immigrants, basically, they're not all that familiar and don't have the experience in their home countries. So, this country is great by, it does have those opportunities, but information doesn't flow very easily. So, that was my job, to get people informed and get them to participate. It's still a job. We've got a ways to go.

DC: I'll ask more about that, but can you tell me about the radio stations? There're bilingual radio stations. Can you tell me about what got you involved and the power of radio and--.

MC: The reason I wanted to own radio stations is because information is freedom. The ability to communicate with the people that are impacted by governmental and private decisions is through information, which is not readily available. In San Diego, there were no Spanish-language stations to inform Spanish speakers. Those few signals that reached San Diego were from Mexico in Tijuana. Tijuana is not interested in informing residents of San Diego about city council meetings, school board meetings, information about San Diego. There were a couple, also, signals from Los Angeles. That information is about Los Angeles. So, you have Spanish-speaking populations not knowing what was going on. There were no Spanish-language newspapers. They were a small community--two or three Spanish, but they were small and limited in terms of getting the word

out. There's nothing like real time information, rather than history that happened last week.

So, that's why I wanted to own a radio station to be able to provide real-time information, because information is power. You cannot remain in the closet or ignorant, without knowing what opportunities exist and how to get yourself informed to take advantage of opportunities. So, that's the reason why I wanted to start a radio station. Having learned about how to do businesses through McDonalds--and, McDonalds is one of the biggest users of radio and television. Every franchisee is required by franchise agreement to spend four percent of all gross income for advertising radio and television and so forth. So, I knew, both as a user and a buyer, about the radio station business. I applied in 1980. Ronald Reagan was president, and they deregulated. Under his orders, they deregulated the airwaves--the frequencies that were available.

For example, Ronald Reagan was a sports announcer for the Chicago Cubs and Des Moines, Iowa for station 1040. There was only one station in the whole country at 1040. There was no way that a 1040 could reach the West Coast. There was no 1040 on the West Coast. Deregulation meant that there was a 1040 signal available on the West Coast. I applied for it, as did a whole bunch of other people. So, I was competing with people from San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, but I won, because I was committed and dedicated. I formed a company--a team--multicultural. Quetzal Bilingual Communications. The purpose of Quetzal is because that's Aztec. The roots. And, it's the bird. What better way to

demonstrate going over the air as a bird? Quetzal Bilingual Communications. That was the company that we formed.

It took over ten years of struggling, fighting off other competitors, and other applicants, but we prevailed. It took a lot of money, and it took a lot of time. But, once we got that one--and I, [1:25:00] with other partners, was able to leverage and go up the state of California, half a dozen in other cities in California to form radio stations--formed other companies to be able to do that. We connected them by satellite, so that we could--economy of scale--enjoy better success. But, we were able to—I'll give you one example. In Barrio Logan, there's a lot of pollution because of the bay, and there was no community planning group to have regulations about what toxic--there were junkyards next to houses, rodents infested, polluting companies, the tuna factory, Monsanto, who harvested seaweed, and a byproduct was toxic gas. All of that and the port commission, which controls the tidelands on the bay--Barrio Logan's right on the bay--would call me to ask that we run public service announcements when they were going to be releasing toxic gases that would flow over Barrio Logan.

So, obviously, as a public service, I did that. Unfortunately, it was to prevent a negative, but the positive was getting information out that was noncommercial. We didn't get paid for public service announcements. We did it, because it was a service. We started the station, the company, because we wanted to serve. Fortunately, we were able to make money to be able to succeed and continue. I'm dedicated by life to public service, even in the private sector. As I told you, I did voter registration. I didn't get paid to do voter registration or give

away products, like French fries. I did it, because it was a public service. I believe it. I was fortunate that I'd be able to do that, because that's really what helped me along, is others extending a hand and lending, helping out. I truly believe that. That's what America is about is trying to help your fellow man. If you can help, why not? How many dollars can you spend? How many meals can you eat? How many houses can you live in? How many cars can you drive? You've got to help your fellow brother to the extent that you can, and that's what I've done all my life, and that's what I'm about.

DC: What I hear you saying, what I've picked up on in our conversation is this love for what is possible here, but, also, a need to apply pressure to keep that possibility open for others. Did I get that right?

MC: That's correct. You see it in various ways. As I mentioned, in terms of elected officials that are supposed to represent the people, well, they represent the voters that vote. We needed to change that. We needed to influence public officials by common sense approaches of showing them where discrepancies exist in terms of public services, public access, public policy. That wasn't fair, because it wasn't representing. They were just representing people that voted, but there were other people that needed their attention and their services in public laws, like bilingual education, like bilingual pay--things that people that voted for them were not going to be advocating.

So, we learned it took pressure. Some of that pressure also was softened by raising money though political action committees to add a little bit of sugar to the conversation. When I was at McDonalds, I organized with other McDonald

franchisees, a political action committee called MAC-PAC to influence or to raise money to contribute. I met with governors of the state of California. I contributed significantly to the campaign of Jerry Brown when he first ran in the 1970s, [1:30:00] Gray Davis, Cruz Bustamante, and so forth.

Jerry Brown--whenever there was a judicial position open, the reason they called me is because I contributed through the Golden 500. Privately, outside of McDonalds, we also had a Hispanic based Golden-and, we had chapters throughout San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, etc. We taxed ourselves. As a matter of fact, the membership was $500, and we raised other moneys, and we contributed. For example, the first one where we started, Jerry Brown was running for governor, and he was dating a Hispanic, as a matter of fact. Linda Ronstadt. He was sympathetic, but we influenced that a little bit more.

So, whenever he got elected and there was a judicial opening in San Diego, I'd get a phone call. Once, it was an opening for six judges. He [said], "Do you have any recommendations?" I nominated all six judges, all lawyers in San Diego--Hispanic--and they all got appointed judges. Six all at one time and others. He appointed me to a board that dealt with the retirement money--pension funds. So, we made recommendations on how that should be more adequately distributed as its earning returns and so people have to use it when they retire. So, we involved--it's a two-way street. You help them, and they help you, but you get more attention when they feel that you contributed to them getting elected. It's been that way, not only with the governor. I did it with Pete Wilson, who was

actually hostile to Hispanics when he was governor of California with the anti-immigrant resolution.

Ever since that, over twenty years ago, there has not been a Republican elected officer in the state of California run statewide, be it governor, be it senator. There hasn't been one Republican, with the exception of one, Arnold Schwarzenegger, who was a movie star--well known, and he employed his nanny who was a Mexican. So, he employed Hispanics. Of course, there were--the point is, he was very--that hostility remains to this day. It's unfortunate for the Republicans that they're taking such a beating in California, but you have to be responsive to the electorate.

DC: So, has the number of Hispanic registered voters gone up in the time that you've been working on these issues?

MC: I'm pleased to say, yes. However, we've got a long way to go. We have a long way to go. It's because, as I say, information doesn't flow very easily. Some people that immigrate from countries where there's dictators, and the democracy isn't as wide open or high corruption, they're not familiar or willing to participate, because they see the cards stacked against them. They don't participate. So, it takes a little bit of reeducation, so to speak, of what the democratic process is all about. Although they're democratic societies they come from, they're not really, in practice, that democratic.

DC: Have the public schools changed in terms of educating Latinos since you were a child here in San Diego?

MC: Definitely. Not to the extent they ought to, as you can see by the evidence. Over fifty percent of Hispanics entering public school are Hispanic. Yet, the graduation rate is horrific. Why is that? It's still got a ways to go. It's changed, yes. There is such a thing as bilingual education, which, at least, provides a starting point where they can start learning as in transition from [1:35:00] their native language to English, but it takes time. Language is not that easy for some folks. There's also, in California, a movement to have multicultural curriculum, so that they're learning about different cultures, especially their own. The Southwest was Mexican for years, centuries.

It reminds me of a story that the--when I was in Europe and heard all the different languages spoken in the same country--multiple languages. It surprises me that there's a debate that English should be the only language--the official language, while other countries [are] very enriched by being multilingual, multicultural. It's a struggle to have it here. The sign of an educated person is knowing about other cultures, other languages. When I was going to college, I studied about--I was fortunate to have great teachers, and my art teacher, for example, was an expert on the Aztecs, the Mayas, the Toltecas, the Chichimecas, and their art and culture. I named companies after Aztec leaders. Quetzal is one of the gods of the Aztecs. Quinto sol, the fifth sun, is the world we're in today. I named one of my companies. Aztlán is the southwest part where the Aztecs originated, and they migrated until they got to Mexico City. I named companies Aztec. Aztec Nut and Bolt, and people asked me, "Why?" I [said], "That's a sign of educated person."

I studied about the Greeks, as many college students take curriculums, study about other cultures. That's a sign of an educated person. Why do you play down and call it racism or discrimination when you promote other cultures that deserve respect and recognition? That's the sign of an educated person, not an ignorant or prejudiced person. So, that's why I promoted and keep promoting multiculturalism, because that's a sign that you understand we're all connected.

As a matter of fact, you asked about La Raza and Chicanos. During the Mexican Revolution, one of the members of the revolution was an educator, José Vasconcelos. José Vasconcelos wrote a book right after the war, the Mexican Revolution, called La Raza Cósmica. The cosmic race. That's where the concept, La Raza, comes from. One of the first national organizations I was asked, invited to join was the National Council of La Raza, which is the most prominent Latino national organization. I served the maximum terms. During that time, I worked with President Ronald Reagan. This was in the 1980s, and we worked with Senator Orrin Hatch, Republican, and Senator Ted Kennedy, Democrat, and Reagan's presidential delegates, and the National Council of La Raza, board and staff, to develop immigration reform. That passed signed by Ronald Reagan. IRCA, it was called. Immigration Reform [and Control] Act. Some people call it amnesty. It was actually a way to pardon and legalize people already here fully employed and contributing to the building of America. Yet, people said we shouldn't be doing that. We're a country of immigrants. [1:40:00] Why not let people that are working here, contributing to build their country greater, be able to

live here without being scared of being deported? They're already here working. Why not just legalize the situation and acknowledge that that's the fact?

So, I worked that, but I didn't do it by myself. I did it with others, because that's how you get things done is working together. I'm very proud of having been able to make achievements working with--in the state of California, the most influential multicultural organization is the Green Lines Institute. It started in housing--green lining. The opposite of red lining, which is done by insurance companies and real estate industry to limit access to funding to buy a house through banks and lending institutions to green lining to be able to do away with mitigating against red lining. That organization is led by African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos statewide. I was the delegate from San Diego to the Green Lines board of directors, and served in that capacity for over twenty years. We worked on banks, insurance industry, telephone industry, utilities to open up green line opportunities for underserved populations.

Under that role, I was asked by the public utilities commission to chair the deregulation of the telephone industry in California. I was chairman of that for ten years, and we developed a citizens' board that reported to the public utilities commission, and we provided services in ten languages for all telephone wire and wireless companies in California. That's an example of doing something with other multicultural groups in the state of California to be able to have fairness for underserved populations. That's just one example.

DC: Can you tell us a little bit too about your own involvement in electoral politics as an elected official yourself?

MC: My own opinion of the response to immigrants?

DC: No. You ran for office yourself, correct?

MC: Yes.

DC: Could you tell us a little bit about that, and then we will get to that subject.

MC: Yes, the first time I ran for public office was school board, because education is key. There has never been or had been--today, there is one Hispanic on the school board. One. When I ran, there were none, and there never had been. The reason why is because the electoral system--the process to get elected was district-wide. That's why we worked to change that system, so that you run by districts in neighborhoods, so you're closer to the schools and the communities where the voters are that needed the services of the public officials. That didn't exist when I ran. I had to run district wide. The whole district in San Diego, unified--covers the whole city. It was a challenge, but I did win in the primary race to go into the general election. In the general election, my opponent was a nice lady, senior citizen, who had a lot of knowledge of the political--she was the staff of a state assemblyman, so she knew the ins and outs of that. She had access to the assemblyman that she worked with and accessed his sources of income. So, I was out-funded significantly. Yet, the schoolteachers [1:45:00] endorsed me.

It was a close race, but I lost. I did a post-analysis of the election. It turned out that only nineteen percent of the electorate had children in school. Over sixty percent were senior citizens that participated in hot lunches at every school. They were more interested in hot lunches than in the education of children. The school

race had nothing to do with education. I wrongly focused on education, trying to open up the school opportunities for all, including those underserved. That's a novice for you running for opposed--thinking it was about education when I missed the boat with the electorate. That's the unfairness of information and education. It's unevenly distributed, so that people are knowledgeable of how the system works.

DC: And, did you run for other offices?

MC: Second office I ran was also for education at the community college level, because the majority of underserved, their first--after graduating from high school, their next step is the community college not a four-year university, because they can't afford it or they're not--community colleges are closer to them and more affordable. So, I ran for the southernmost community college district that's adjacent to Tijuana. It's called Southwestern Community College. I ran for that office.

Before I decided to run, I pulled together Latino leaders throughout the area. They unanimously said they would support me. I decided that I'd run, because I had a base. They would support me, and the majority of the ethnic groups were Hispanic, obviously in the South Bay route, next to Tijuana. Unfortunately, one of the professors got into some hot water in the district, and he convinced his brother to run, so that he would have a relative to defend him, because he was getting into trouble. This was after the promise of all the leaders that they would support me. Well, the end result was that we had two Hispanics running and an Anglo, very wealthy, from Coronado. The district also--that's

called gerrymandering--included the wealthy Anglos from Coronado, one of the wealthiest communities in San Diego. That was part of the district. I was outspent, again, and she was elected official from Coronado. So, it was a close race, and the most voters voted for Hispanic, but there were two Hispanics.

DC: So, it split.

MC: I came in second. That was my second experience. The last time I ran was for city council. I had been involved in redistricting. It's done every ten years after the census count. The enumeration changes districts, because they become unbalanced through ten years of growth. Growth is not even. It's very uneven. So, you have to redraw lines to comply with the US Constitution of one man, one vote. It's really one person, not one man, but one person, one vote. You redistribute, so you draw lines. I've been involved since 1980 in redistricting.

My first effort was redrawing the lines for the state of California for state assembly and state. Ten years later, I was asked by the county chief administrative officer to help him redraw the county lines. I served on the county redistricting. The next time, there was a change of method of how people got selected. [1:50:00] To make it less partisan or political, San Diego chose to have judges select commissioners to draw the lines. I was honored to be selected by judges to be redistricting the city of San Diego lines.

The most recent was the 2010 census, and the city, again, had to redraw lines. The citizens, the Latino residents of San Diego were being left out, and they created a Latino redistricting committee to shadow the work done by people appointed by the government. I was selected the chairman of the Latino

redistricting committee. So, we influenced the drawing and created, for the first time, a district that was majority Latino--Latino residents not voters, but it was Latino, and then asked me to run. So, I ran for the last time for city council of the newly created ninth district. It was a new district, because of the population growth in San Diego, and it was a Latino majority district--the ninth district.

The voter turnout was less than ten percent. Of those that could vote, less than ten percent turned out to vote. Who ran against me? An incumbent city council person from another district that moved to the ninth district to—Anglo--from a newscaster, obviously well known, because [she] appeared in the television every day as a newscaster. Well known. Nice lady. With so few people voting, they went with name ID, a person that was already an incumbent who was on their television sets every day. So, I gave it my best shot, and that's the last time I ran.

DC: So, what are you working on now?

MC: My wife and I, we own a business. Besides being for profit, it also has a social benefit to help people that have difficulties. In California, when somebody gets a driving under the influence, when they get a citation, a ticket, for driving under the influence, especially if it's the second one, they're required to put a breathalyzer in their car. That's what we do. We install breathalyzers in cars for people that have been cited for driving under the influence. They're with us as a customer until they serve their term, and the length of time they're on depends on their situation--the blood alcohol. Did they hurt anybody? Did they do damage? All the circumstances that could happen affect how long they're with us

as a customer, but we see quite a few graduate, because we've been at it for half a dozen years. We represent the best manufacturer in the country. They've been at it, since--it's a German company that's been at it since World War I. As you know, gas was used in World War I, so they're experts in gas. As a matter of fact, they're the number one suppliers of gas in hospitals worldwide. They make those machines, because they're based on activation of gas--breathalyzers. So, we're providing a service. Yet, we're making a living.

My wife and I--she's also a businesswoman, and she's the one that actually forced me to write the book--my autobiography, *Journey in Search of the American Dream*, because of her. She [said], "You've got to do it." I had a garage full of files. "What's all this?" All the walls with plaques and awards. [1:55:00] She [said], "You've got to write a book about it." So, I did with the help of the National Council of La Raza, their permission to use--and been on the board. A lot of the activities that I did was with the founders of the National Council as well as members when I was serving for the maximum of two terms. I've done that with organizations. I've never done anything by myself that's meaningful. Always with others, especially similar-situated underserved populations. That's what I'm about.

DC: So, maybe a last question. We talked a little bit before. You were talking about immigration reform under Reagan. Can you talk a little bit about where we are now and your thoughts on, especially, immigration issues?

MC: Well, the United States, although it's a country of immigrants, the only natives are the Native Americans. The pilgrims were immigrants. As a

matter of fact, the Spanish, were here over a hundred years before the pilgrims arrived, and other immigrants from other countries all over the world have come to this country. We're a country of immigrants, and we're proud of it. As a matter of fact, our Constitution spells out that we're all equal under the law, and we all participate. As a matter of fact, the French donated a statute welcoming immigrants to this country, whether they be Irish from escaping the potato famine, be they Italians, be they Irish, be they from South and Central America, be they from Asia, we're a country of immigrants. That's our history. That's what's made this country great.

However, it's also a dynamic issue. Things have changed over the years, whereby it was open borders, welcoming everybody, to being a little bit concerned that, maybe, they're taking jobs away. Nobody paid attention to the jobs they took or they got were jobs that people didn't want. My first wife is from Oregon. The few workers that were available to work in the Willamette Valley and the farms were immigrants from Mexico, yet there were not enough immigrants. You had strawberries rotting in the fields, because there were not enough. As a matter of fact, the schools closed early, so the children could go out in the fields and pick strawberries, so they wouldn't be rotting in the fields. People don't realize that they're creating jobs. Immigrants are creating jobs. Over eighty percent of the farm work in California is done by immigrants.

The reform act that we did is to pardon those that are already here. I agree that there should be a regulated process as to how people come here and so forth, but, because we are--as a matter of fact, research has shown that immigrants

contribute billions of dollars to our economy, having invented developments in our high-tech world and contributed significantly. Yet, this persistent concern that, A, they're taking jobs, and now more recently, since we got involved in wars in the Middle East, there are people that have hostile feelings, are coming here with that hostility from countries, from Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, other countries that may not have friendly intentions. That dimension adds to the mix of sentiment about immigrants. As a matter of fact, one candidate that's [2:00:00] running for president is talking about building walls and deporting--it's a debate. It's an ongoing fluctuating debate, but my opinion is that we're a country of immigrants. Yes, it makes sense that we should have a regulated process, so that it's controlled to the extent that it's absorbed, that it's needed by our economy, by our communities. We don't put walls. That's not the reasonable, sensible way to approach this. Yes, we should have some kind of a regulated process that--we all have a voice to say about having a sane policy on how we manage that.

DC: Thank you. So, winding up here, any questions that I should have asked you today or that you thought I might ask you that I didn't, or anything I should have asked you?

MC: Well, I'm honored and pleased that you've taken the time to talk to me, and about sharing my experiences in terms of what the intent of Congress, was in terms of sharing the contributions of folks with different backgrounds that have been ignored over the years. What I'd like to learn a little bit more [is] the end product in terms of the distribution of that and how we can make it more accessible. As I said before, education is really what opens the eyes, opens the

minds of folks that don't have a full understanding of our complete society. I'd like to know how we can get it into the hands of those that need it, that should get fully enlightened and be more informed of the contributions other folks have done that, maybe, [don't] speak their language or live in their neighborhoods, but are here to contribute to make this country greater.

DC: I think that's a great point, one we can talk about.

MC: So, that's what I'm interested in. That's why I agreed to participate.

Female 1: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

END OF INTERVIEW

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