UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
CENTER FOR PUBLIC HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

CARLOS CALBILLO

Annotation

Carlos Calbillo was part of the radical movement during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's and 1970's. His represents the mobility of the era that sent him from Pasadena, Texas to California to work with Cesar Chavez in the United Farm Worker strikes and to participate in the Chicano Manifesto pronouncement in Denver. His insights into the radical perspective and its accommodation with the moderate Chicano leaders is historically significant.

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT

History of Mexican Americans in Houston

Interview with: Carlos Calbillo
Interviewed by: Ernesto Valdés
Date: May 3, 2006
Transcribed by: Michelle Kokes
Location:

EV: This is Ernesto Valdés interviewing Carlos Calbillo at the Teatro Bilingue, in Houston at the offices located at 333 South Jenson on May 3, 2006 and I have explained to you what we are going to do with this is that correct? It is for the archives and all of that. Okay will you give me your full name?

CC: My full name is Carlos Calisal Calbillo.

EV: And where were you born Carlos?

CC: I was born in Houston, Texas in Methodist Hospital.

EV: Were you living in one of the barrios?

CC: I was, we were living in Magnolia on Avenue I.

EV: Is that where you lived when you started school?

CC: I went to elementary school… no actually I didn't go to school in Houston at all. My parents moved to Pasadena, went to the, started school in the segregated Mexican schools over there, or school over there, they only had one. And then went to Palma Elementary. My parents left and went to California. I had to go with them of course. I went to Junior High over there and a little bit of high school and then I came back to Pasadena and entered San Rayburn High School and I graduated from San Rayburn in 1967.

EV: Did you go to college?

CC: I went to the University… I went to San Jacinto College for two years to study photo journalism and then I transferred to U of H and I went there part of one semester and then I dropped out of school.

EV: And when you dropped out where did you…did you begin your career as a photo journalism?

CC: No actually when I dropped out, I was in fact already working. I was a librarian for a National Student Mental Health Sponsored project called the Chicano Training Center and I was a librarian there. I basically built an archive. I started a publication, "Mano a Mano." It was a NAMH sponsored project to develop training tools relevant to the Mexican-American experience. And I was there for, I don't know, a year or two until funding for that ceased under our government and so I was, the center was shut down.

EV: And then where did you go from there?

CC: Well I had the opportunity… I don't know… well I went to work at Channel 2, KPRC-TV in Houston. But that is another long story…

EV: Okay…

CC: Pretty interesting. I mean I don't know…

EV: Go ahead.

CC: Well I mean since I was about 18 or 19 years old I had always been interested in politics. And so my interest in politics led me to work in or to be very interested in the civil rights movements. And at that time we were talking about the African-American civil rights movement. I was very much interested in that, although I didn't, I wasn't involved in it very much. I was in high school after all. In April of 1968 Dr. Martin

Luther King was assassinated while trying to rally a garbage worker strike in Memphis, Tennessee. And of course, many American cities erupted in violence because of that. Here in Houston there wasn't much of that. However, it was announced, that I don't know two or three days after that assassination, on a Saturday morning I believe, there was going to be a march from the Third Ward into downtown to commemorate Dr. King's legacy and his search for non-violent solutions to conflict. And so I was just a kid I was like, I don't know 17 or 18 years old, but being that I was very idealistic, I decided that I should go to this march to support what these people were doing. So I went to the march and at the march I found I was one of the few Latinos at this march. There was, it was mostly obviously a lot of black people and a few whites, several whites but I couldn't see anyone else there that was Latino. Maybe, I don't know, maybe you could count them on your hand. So I saw this one guy and he was in the march too and he was a Latino and actually at the time he didn't look very Latino, but since he saw me and realized that I was he came over to talk to me and that's how I met Leonel J. Castillo.

EV: Oh really?

CC: And we met, after the march he said, he said to me, "Listen you're a young guy and you seem like you care about things. He invited me to a meeting. And the meeting was held just down the street from here on Navigation, in the 2800 block of Navigation. It is now a bar but back then it was a house and that was the headquarters of PASSO, The Political Association of Spanish Speaking Organizations. And he invited me to a meeting there and I went there and I actually went inside and that's where I met Tony Marron, many, many people who now has a park named after them in Houston. David Ortiz, I met a lot of what that… at that time we'd have to be called the political activists of the

city. It was 1968. This was an organization, the Political Association of Spanish Speaking Organizations or PASSO. 1967 or '68, and anyway they would have meetings and they would organize voter education and registration drives. And I would start going on these drives and trying to register people to vote in the Second Ward. It was hard. You know, I mean we would walk up some of these streets are huge like super street, it's huge. And we would go door to door and see who was registered. A lot of people didn't have interest but it was like, we were out toiling in the vineyards. We were trying to something, anything. You know and anyway because of this a consequence of this is that I started meeting everybody. When I mean everybody, I mean I started meeting the judges, a lot of the attorneys, I stared meeting people that were either actively engaged in political activity or change or activists or people that were very interested in that. One of the guys I met was Judge Alfred…

EV: Alfred Hernandez?

CC: Yes Judge Alfred Hernandez. They named a tunnel after him (laughter). To get from downtown to the north side you have to go through the Judge Alfred Hernandez tunnel. So I met him. Well anyway, this is related to me going to Channel 2 in 1972 or 1973, he… I had married, I had married and I had a kid and, a little girl. And I was laid off of the Chicano Training Center. So therefore I decided that I needed to find a job and quick. Well, so I knew that my job would end in two or three months. Well out of the blue I get a call from Judge Alfred Hernandez who I had met in the political wars. I was just a kid, you know I was 20, let me see I was 22 or so, 23 maybe I don't know. And he called me up and says, "Look Carlos I just came from a very disturbing meeting." He started telling me about them. He had been called by the administration of KPRC-TV

Channel 2, which was the NBC affiliate in Houston to come to a meeting. And he got there to this meeting and they all sat at a big conference room. And the president was there of the corporation, a guy by the name of Colonel Jack Harris and all the top administration of the station where there. You have to understand that then, as now, these are very important people. But these are all wealthy white people, white men and he said that he had been called to this meeting. The purpose of the meeting he was told beforehand was to what we now call, we now know in FCC, Federal Communications Commission terms, as they wanted to do an ascertainment. Basically in order for the TV stations to continue to hold their licenses in the public interests because the airways belong to the people, supposedly. They do regular ascertainments where they bring together community representatives and/or leaders and they ask them basically, "How are we doing?" and "What can we do to meet the, to create programming to meet the needs and discuss the issues and the problems in your community." So the judge was telling me all of this and he says, "You know what Carlos I go to this stupid thing…" because he was upset about it, he says, "I walk in there and there are twelve people and they are all black except for me." This is the public that they had called in. So one by one they went around the table and each of the African-American participants spoke about what they felt were issues, needs, problems and when they got to Alfred Hernandez, he was last he says, "I just lit into them." I told them, "Look, you invited twelve people here. I'm the only one that isn't black. Don't get me wrong there's nothing wrong with that. But you know there's lots of issues and needs in the Mexican-American community and you only invited one person. And not only that, it's not that you only invited one person but I'm a judge! I'm not… I'm not representative of what's out there. You know I'm a… since

I'm a judge I'm not really someone that is in attuned to this stuff as much as some other person would be." So he just started criticizing and they said, finally they said back to him, "Judge Hernandez we apologize but we're really trying to make a good faith effort here." He says, "Well let me ask you this: How many people work here at your station?" Well at that time KPRC-TV was one of the largest stations in the south. It was a huge operation. They did, it was a multi-million dollar corporation that did lots, did most of… actually did most of the television and commercial production for most of Texas, largest station in Texas, based in Houston. The guy told him, "Well we have about 200 people that work here." And so the judge says that he asked them, "How many of them are Mexican-Americans?" Well they started to hem and haw, you know this is 1972 or '73 and he says, "Well you know the problem judge is that it's not our fault. You know Mexican-Americans don't come here to apply." Well of course the Judge knew right away that that was a standard answer of any corporation, because he dealt with all of them. So after that, so he let into them some more and then someone who went to the meeting, the program director, Tom Reef came to him and said, "Listen, I want you to send me a guy, I want you to send me a young man and I'll hire him and we'll put him in the production department." Well, you know, the rest as they say is history. That was my way into this industry. So after this whole story was over, and again I was about four months from losing my job, needing a job… Judge was on the phone to me and says, "Carlos go down there and apply." And I said, "Well Judge I don't really know anything about television. I mean I know how to turn it on and off and change a channel." But he says, "Go down there and apply." I said, "Okay." So I go down there, I walked up I walked up into the offices, very plush offices of the program director, Mr. Tom Reef. I

said, "I'm here, Judge Hernandez asked me to come by." They gave me a job application, I filled it out then subsequent to that he interviewed me and he made some notes on the application and I left. I didn't think anything more about it. Well two months later I'm about a month away from losing my job, I get a phone call from Channel 2 and they tell me, "Come on down here and start." I said, "Well I can't really start now I'm going to have to wait a couple of weeks and give my notice and all that." So I did that and on a Monday morning I walked in there. And I walked into Channel 2 and I mean it was a complete different world than what I was used to. I mean it was very interesting. I was lead into the production department, huge television studios, lights everywhere, cranes, cameras, and I met the production manager a man named Middleton. And he took me into the studio he says, "Well what we want you to do is just hang out. Just try to see what people are doing, try to learn things." Because they knew I had no knowledge of what was going on. So I said, "Alright." So I did that. So I started hanging out and I met the Patterson brothers who were two black guys who were very famous because their father had been a very famous football coach at Worthing. I mean a legend. I mean they were there. And of course they were already experienced. Andy Patterson later became the lighting director. Anyway, saw them there and I'm looking around and they have these huge RCA television cameras that roll on the floor and lights and all kinds of instruments, all sorts of equipment, all kinds of stuff that was very, looked at me very intimidating because I didn't know what to do. So anyway one day I guess two or three days I'm there and everyone never, I mean everyone didn't know who I was and most of the crew as white, you know and I went up and tried to say, "Hello" to one guy and he turned around, his name was Jim Waley, big red neck guy and he just

looked at me and wouldn't shake my hand just walked off, gave me a dirty look and walked off. And I met a lot of that. But I realized that I wasn't going to let that bother me because I had my eye on the prize and you know, I have put many people, over my career I have put several people into the industry, one of my students is now the head of creative services at Univision in San Antonio. I've got another one of my students that is in the engineering department at KPRC-TV, and different people like that. And when I tell them that that that's what happened, they get very, they don't really understand that kind of thing. They don't get it. They say, "Man if someone like that did that to me I would have just slugged him." I said, "Well you know that's what you feel like doing but you really can't do that. Because he's got something that you want and you need, you got to get it out of him first." Actually, Jim Whaley when I left there nine years later he had become one of my closest friends. He came up and wished me well. That's amazing…It's incredible. Anyway, the point is I was there and one day, two or three days there I started rolling the camera around and some guy came up to me, I forget who it was, might have been Pat Patterson. He found me in the studio. The studio was empty because there was nothing going on at that particular moment. And he saw me kind of trying to kind of look at a camera and try the controls on it, big studio camera, he walked up and said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well I came here to be a camera man. I'm trying to…" He said, "No you didn't." He said, "Get your hands off of that camera." So I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You're not even going to touch a camera for about a year." I said, "What are you talking about?" So I got upset. He said, "You see all these light? You're going to learn how to light." I said, "I didn't come here to light. I came here to be a camera man." He said, "No you didn't." He said, "You've got to learn

how to light because if you were the best camera man in the world and your stuff looked like crap because it wasn't lit well then what's the point?" So I got upset because I didn't understand what he was talking about. Of course, now I do because lighting is one of the most fundamental things in production, either film or video and he taught me how to light. And he taught me the kinds of light, he told me how to control light. He taught me things like, basic things like fill light, key light, back light, how to paint with light, how to use colored light. I mean I loved it. And sure enough he was right. I mean one of the things, I mean I see a lot of people coming out, even out of school, our TV schools, UT, U of H, you name it they have very little understand of light, which is of course physics. And not only that, but it's you know I work now with young film makers. And many of them come in here that have already made two or three films and they don't even light because they have no concept of how to use lights. First of all they don't have any lights. You know… production lights. And even if they don't have production lights you can go out and buy some very basic lights at a hardware store, they wouldn't know how to use them anyway. So that's… to me I was given a rude awakening but something that was very, very good for me. I've been in this industry 35 years. I've worked all over the place. I've done network level stuff. I've worked for ABC Sports, CBS, NBC, football, baseball, I've done a lot of sports. I've done, I don't know hundreds, and hundreds of live programs. I'm a director, I'm a producer I've done… I'm a script writer. I've made six films. I'm now working on my new documentary. I'm doing a documentary project on the future of Latino Politics in Houston which is something that I'm going to try to launch, or get production underway this year. Of course now, everything is, we are in a digital world, high definition world. So it is a very different world from when I started. I

started in an analog world and now it has all become digital. But anyway that is part of the story. And that's how that happened.

EV: And did you stay with Channel 2.

CC: I was there nine years.

EV: For nine years? And then where did you go from there?

CC: Well they did me a great favor and they fired me. So therefore from there I went over to the University of Houston, the National Association of District Attorneys which was at the Law School and they had a department within them, within that organization that did legal training video tapes. So I took over that department. I ran that for a year and then I left, they closed down the department because of a budget cut back. I went over to Rice University. I was the director of the AV department in the Fondren Library there for about nine months. Then they opened up in Houston the first public access channel. As part of the contract between the cable companies and city they gave them four channels. One of them was a public access channel. I became the first program director there. I stayed there two years and then I left there to just start freelancing. Did a lot of Spanish language, at that time Spanish language television was blowing up in Houston. Did a lot of that for several years and then ended up at the Paxnet station doing a public service, Director of Public Service public relation.

EV: Excuse me what kind, the Pac?

CC: The Pax-net, it's a network.

EV: P-A-X-N-E-T?

CC: PAXNET. Yeah, it's a network. One of many, many networks that have proliferated from when I began there were basically just four networks, now there are

hundreds of them. And so therefore, I was there for a year, two years. Then I decided to, I came back into the community. I'm here at the Teatro Bilingue de Houston. I've been here six years running the film making department, teaching film making, working with kids, mostly in the inner city and doing films and teaching film making. So that's…

EV: That brings us up to today right?

CC: To the present time yes.

EV: Alright let me take you back a little bit. Let me go back… How did you first become involved in what we now call El Movimiento, the Chicano protests and back in the late '60's early '70s.

CC: Okay well that's a good question. I was in high school in, when in 1967 I graduated, that whole last semester, that Spring semester and the previous semester I guess in '66 all of my friends and people there from my community were all talking about how they were going to graduate and join the marine corps or go into the army. There was a war going on in Vietnam. And it seemed to be a universal thing. A lot of people wanted to join up and go fight. And all of my uncles, my father was in the army he fought in World War II. He had visited exotic places like Italy and Greece and didn't talk much about the war though. Anyway, it was decided that of all my friends that they were going to enlist rather than get drafted. There was a draft on. Well this interested me because I've always been, because of the fact that I was, because of my background when I was in junior high and always running the rough streets of Watts in Compton, California, and trying to stay away from gangs and stay away from getting killed I found a refuge in a LA County public library.

EV: You went from Houston to Los Angeles?

CC: Right. I was there five years. I talked about it previous. I spent five years over there. Where I ran into some very interesting times because I lived in… at first I lived in Willowbrook then we moved to Compton and that was right on the edge of Watts. And Compton at that time, 1961, '62 was half black and half Latino. And of course now it is like 99% black, Compton is. And very famous because, just because it is famous. Compton is legendary. I think TuPac came out of Compton if I'm not mistaken. Anyway, the point is it was a very, it was a time of great racial tension between these two groups who especially in the schools. The schools would be… the schools were full of gangs. I moved out of, I left Pasadena, Texas Pomroy Elementary and went directly to California and entered an elementary school. I had never even seen a black person.

EV: Really in Houston?

CC: I group up in Pasadena. .

EV: I mean Pasadena?

CC: In Pasadena at that time in 1960 there were no black people frankly, simply because they were not welcome there. Pretty much it was like present day Vidor. You know.

EV: And so the tension you talked about was between the Chicanos and the Blacks?

CC: Right.

EV: Okay.

CC: Gang fights, gangs… extreme violence. I went from growing up in basically a, you know, "Leave it to Beaver" type of atmosphere to right into a gang street war atmosphere. It was like night and day. And I didn't understand it. And I would walk to school and I would get jumped by black gangs and beaten up. And it was worse than

that. Since I was the new kid in town, the new kid at school, the Mexican kids immediately for some reason thought I was not Mexican. They thought I was a Gypsy. I'm not sure why. I wasn't speaking very much Spanish back then. That may have been why, the way I talked or my accent or something. So they didn't like me and they decided that they would beat me up after school. So once they got through beating me up and I start walking back then the black kids would see me, they'd come beat me up. I was a little kid.

EV: Nam would have been a picnic.

CC: I was a little kid. I was a little scrawny kid, you know. And of course this really upset me but I just couldn't talk to my parents about it. I couldn't communicate. So I was being beaten up every day. On the way to school on the way back by basically by gangs. And I realized that I wasn't going to last long. How I got out of that though is another interesting story. I went from being beat up every day before and after school by gangs of Latinos and gangs of blacks, I went from that to within in a month basically running that school. I mean no one would touch me. When people saw me walking down the street they would turn and cross the street. They would stay out of my way.

EV: What made the difference?

CC: This is a fascinating story and it's in my novel by the way, I'm writing a book… What happened was this: I had no friends, zero friends. I was, and I was ostracized. And so one thing I always had, I carried a little notebook with me I used to like to draw things in, draw pictures. And I just loved that. I would sit there at lunch or recess I would go and sit under a tree and hope that nobody would mess with me and I would pull out my

book and I would start drawing little cartoons. I would draw characters. I'd make up things I'd draw Disney characters. I just loved to draw.

EV: Excuse me did you keep that book?

CC: No I don't know what happened to it. Anyway, the point is: one day I'm there and I'm drawing and I looked up. I felt a shadow over me. And I looked up and there was this black guy named Gary. Now Gary was in the 6th grade but he really should have been in the 8th or 9th. He was this huge 15 year old very husky kid who had a reputation as a street fighter. And he was the baddest guy at that school, the meanest, baddest person. He had a reputation for being a little crazy. He would be standing, for example, in the lunch line and he would turn around to the person behind him and just slug him in the mouth, just because he felt like it. So he was, since he was crazy he was feared, everyone feared him. Everyone at that school was scared of Gary. And nobody would mess with him. And I looked up and I thought he was going to kill me and I didn't know what to do because I knew who he was. Because everyone knew who that kids was. And suddenly he said to me, "Did you make those pictures." And I didn't know what to say I said, "Sure." And he said, "Let me see." And he took the tablet and started looking through there and he said, "These are good." And I said, "Oh, okay." And he said, "Let me show you mine." And he also pulled out a tablet and he was also into drawing and making up creatures and things like that. And I said, "Wow!" He said, "Look at mine." And I started looking at his and I said, "Yours are pretty good too." Well to make a long story short, we became fast friends, because we both had something that we both loved to do. We both felt ostracized. I mean I was a little 12 year old kid, little Mexican kid, he was a 15 year old African-American who should have been in the 8th grade but he kept

failing and you know. So to make a long story short we became like running buddies. I mean when you saw him you saw me we were always together. Well from that day on he put out the word that I was not to be touched. And from that day on I had no problems at all. It was wonderful. Because I had made a friend who was basically my guardian angel and no one would dare even look at me the wrong way from that day on. Because they knew that if word got out that they had disrespected me in any way they would have to deal with Gary and no one wanted to do that because he was like… Anyway so that's what happened. So anyway, I don't know where we were.

EV: I started with the question was how did you get involved in the movement?

CC: Oh right well I was here, I was… you know we are kind of going back and forth, but anyway so the reason I got that, that we got from that to Gary was that in the time that I was there in getting victimized by all of these gangsters I went to the library and I started reading because to me the library was a sanctuary. I knew that if I could get from the school to the library or from the library to home or from home to the library I could go in there and I could go in the corner and no one would bother me. I mean the gangsters weren't going to go into the library to begin with and two they weren't going to go in there to try and drag me out and kill me. So, well I was in this library and I looked around and I saw these books. So being curious I started examining these books, I started pulling them down and started reading them. And that's how I developed a long, a lifelong love of reading. And I remember my first summer, my parents were very poor. We couldn't afford a place in Stagle. We moved to California, we went out there by the way because of economic advantage. You know Texas was… in 1960 Texas was a very different place than it is now. If you are a minority your opportunities were highly

limited. My father went out there because he had some family that had gone out there. His brother, my uncle had gone out there. My mother's brother and they were reporting how you could go out there and just get a job. You know they didn't discriminate. And so it was a land of opportunity. So everyone was moving to California, going to L.A. Anyway, the first summer I was there my parents were very poor. My parents were big Baptists. They were in the Baptist church. And they started going to this little Baptist church in Willowbrook. In the back of the Baptist church there was this, like a building that they used for meetings but the back part of it was like a residence. So we moved the whole family in there. And my father became the caretaker of the church. And that's where we lived. So the first summer I was there I had a little journal and I would make notes about the books that I had read. That summer between my…between the 6th and 7th grade, in that summer I read 200 books.

EV: Really?

CC: Yeah in three months I read 200 books.

EV: Was there any history or novels?

CC: I read everything. I read everything from geography to history to novels to non-fiction. I just loved to read. I just developed a rabid love of reading. And of course it greatly increased my vocabulary and all this kind of stuff. Anyway, I would even go into the adult section. Not the "adult" section of the library but a section where they had, you know, books for grown up people. I read Ben Hur. I started reading those kind of titles. The librarians thought that was weird because, you know, first of all they didn't think it was proper for a boy to be reading certain things but I just loved to read. So anyway, so fast forward, I'm 18 years I'm at San Rayburn High School, I'm still reading and

everyone wants to go join the Army or the Marines to go fight this war. So I said, "Well… you know." I was curious. So I went to the library and I pulled out a bunch of books about Vietnam and I started reading about Vietnam. Well pretty soon it became pretty obvious that the United States was invading this country or in there, had no business being in there. The entire world was against the United States policy in Vietnam. We were basically taking over the colonial-istic war from the French. We were trying to keep those people from picking their own government all because of the so called "domino" theory or you know whatever and this war was illegal. I came to the conclusion fairly quickly that the war was illegal. The war was wrong. So I started telling all my friends this. "How can you go fight in an illegal war? It's wrong you can't go over there. Don't do it." Well everyone thought I was crazy or weird. Here I am a 17 year old kid telling them the war is wrong and bla, bla, bla…They said, "Well, you know, I don't know what's going to happen." The semester ended, I graduated from high school. I had signed up to go to college or I was going to go to college there was a draft. They wanted to draft me. If you didn't go to college, the only way to get out of being drafted in 1967 was to go to school. So I went to school. I went to school I guess San Jacinto College in Pasadena, Texas. I was there, I don't know… two years. I was there two years. Of course my third semester there I was expelled for growing a beard, or my second semester. I decided to grow a beard. I grew a beard and they had a college and they had a rule against no beards. It was like a high school. So that's how I met David Bird. Who was my ACLU attorney who filed suit for me and we won that case. I'm sure you know of Bird he is fairly notorious. Anyway, I went to school and…

EV: Excuse me did you go to the ACLU or did they look at you?

CC: I went to them. I had to find an attorney. These people wanted to throw me out of school for growing a beard. But anyway, the point is: how did I get involved in this? Well by that point of course I was already working with PASSO and I had decided that LULAC were just a bunch of pussies and they weren't ever going to do anything. And they were very conservative. Anyway the point is, there was a war on so therefore I think, I think after I dropped out, there was a time period there were I was not in school where I was listed 1A. In other words I was going to be drafted. So I went to my draft board and I requested to be reclassified as a conscientious objector. And they asked me, "Well what if we don't classify you as a conscientious objector?" I consciously I was opposed to war. "What if we draft you?" I said, "If you draft me I will not go." They said, "Well if you don't go you will go to prison." And I said, "Well I guess I will have to go to prison because I'm not going to Vietnam this is not right, this is an illegal war." I was very much into that. So they classified me 1-O, not 1-A-O. I carried that draft card for years I was a true conscientious objector. I could not be drafted for anything for any war. I couldn't even be drafted as a medic. If you were 1-A-O you could be drafted for example as a medic. But medics are in combat are basically just soldiers. You know, they are… so anyway, about this time my cases raised a little bit of notoriety and I was contacted by the Southwest Draft Counseling Association out of Austin, Texas and I met with them. And they said, "We need a Latino trainer." So I went to Austin and I learned how to be a trainer. How to train people how to get out of the draft. And I went around, I was on their payroll. I went around to different cities in Texas and set up draft counseling offices where you could go in there and learn to get out of the draft. It was actually a little disappointing to me that basically we were getting mostly Anglo kids out

and minorities were getting drafted in huge numbers to fight the war. They were fighter for the war machine .But that was just another spot. Through that I got introduced to the anti-war movement and I joined the anti-war movement of course and there was huge marches in Austin and here in Houston, my first march in Houston that's where I met the Ku Klux Klan. We had marched to Austin we were at the capital building there was about 10,000 people in front of the capital building and the Klan had come up, there was about, a group of about 30 Klansman and they came up and they went and stood behind the speakers and started harassing them. And when they began that about 200 or 300 people just walked up to them from the audience and surrounded them and they became very quiet. I'll never forget it, it was incredible. These white racists and they were just scared shitless. It was an incredible feeling to walk around them and just look at them and they were just cowards. It was amazing (laughter). Anyway the point being: that from there from my work in PASSO and my political wars I decided at some point to go to California. I left for California I think around late '69 or '70 and I went directly to Los Angeles and then I met Sam Kushner.

EV: What was his credentials?

CC: Sam Kushner is a legendary member of the communist party, who is very active both in the east coast and the west coast. At that time he was an older man. And I met him, I met a bunch of people, I met Angela Davis. I remember going down and seeing Angela Davis at that time she was protesting the George Jackson case they were in front of the Federal Building or the Court's building in L.A. I went down there and I met her. And then strangely enough I turned around and down the street about a block away there was a group of about five Nazi's. I mean these guys were Nazi's. They were dressed in

Nazi uniforms. Neo-Nazi's you know. All white guys and young guys. And they were doing some kind of demonstration and when, I'll never forget this. When the group with when the first group saw the Nazi's they did not hesitate they started running over there toward them to beat them up. And they ran over there and the Nazi's saw them coming so they ran off. Except one or two that were slow and they were trying to shoot mace at people. Well I wasn't going to beat up no Nazi's but I thought that was interesting so I ran over there with the crowd and they caught one or two of them and just beat the crap out of them right in front of me. I didn't really participate in that, but I thought that was interesting. And then afterwards we were all walking back and I said, "You guys do this all the time? You beat people…" "Yeah we see those people we beat 'em up. It's called education." (laughter) So I thought that was pretty fascinating. Sam took me up to Delano and we drove into the 40 acres and there was a birthday party going on for one of the union people. It was a Sunday afternoon and I saw Cesar Chavez sitting there. Sam said, "No. Cesar and I are old friends. I've been, I've know him a long time, I've always helped him. But he doesn't like to come up and acknowledge me because I'm a well known communist so he doesn't want, he doesn't like to do that because of my political…" And Sam was a delightful guy, delightful guy one of the best people I've ever met. So we walked in there. As we walked in Cesar got up walked over and grabbed Sam and gave him a huge hug. I said, "Wow this is pretty crazy." He introduced me too to Cesar Chavez.

EV: Was Cesar only regionally famous at the time?

CC: No he was international.

EV: Had the movement already started?

CC: He was internationally famous. This is way after, you know this is way after the first big…

EV: The boycott?

CC: Well we were, 1970 was right in the heat of the lettuce strike and the lettuce boycott. In '68 after he did that thing he did with Robert F. Kennedy he had signed his first giant contract.

EV: Oh okay so it was after the grape boycott alright.

CC: The grape boycott was over and I had worked in the grape boycott office here in Houston in '69. I, it was a different period, it was an interesting time for a lot of different reasons. But, it seemed that there was a lot of activism going on. A lot of young people… a lot of idealism. And of course when you are around a lot of that you feed off of it. You know us old people in the movement… alright us old people… I mean as an older person, now I'm 57, I don't see that anymore. I mean not that I'm sitting here decrying the fact that there isn't any political activism going on, because there is a lot. I mean as we sit here and talk on April the 4th or the 3rd of the year 2006 we're…

EV: How about MAYO? (laughter)

CC: Here in MAYO, I mean we are seeing the beginnings of a huge brand new political civil rights movement in this country for immigrants and that is incredible.

EV: Let me flip the tape.

End of side 1

CC: Somewhere along the lines... I'm sorry.

EV: Just let me introduce the tape here. We're on side B of tape 1 still interviewing Carlos Calbillo, go ahead.

CC: Yeah you know a lot of these things are funny and the dates are kind of interesting but prior to me going to Delano I had, of course, been working in the boycott office and I had been very active in an organization called MAYO, Mexican-American Youth Organization which was begun as far as I can tell in the late '60s somewhere and had chapters pretty much all over Texas. There was a very famous chapter, of course, in Crystal City. José Angel Gutierrez had started that one. And basically we were basically a kin to the brown berets or something like that, even though at one point there were some brown beret chapters here in Texas as well. But we were considered the trouble maker, the trouble makers the activist, the people who would go out and stir up things and people who would protest and etc. And so as part of MAYO I started making trips into San Antonio, meet with José Gutierrez and Mario Compian and other little chapters all throughout and other little chapters all throughout South Texas, the Rio Grande Valley, Robstown, Raymondville, I was completely unprepared for what I saw in places like that. Huge barrios full of very, very poor people. And this is where the MAYO organization was organized. Here in Houston, we never had more than maybe probably twenty members but we were involved in many things, in many of the activities that tied… of course in 1970 the Houston School District ran that wonderful, decided to pull that wonderful scam on the community called, to meet their integration deadline set by the courts, they paired black and Chicano schools since Chicanos were considered white under law, they started integrating the Mexican schools with blacks and vice versa to meet their integration deadlines.

EV: That's the Ross v. Eckels case.

CC: Or something like that. But the point is: that started huge riots all over Houston because black kids and brown kids, I mean it might have been racism, it probably was, to a great degree that brown parents' didn't want their kids going to black schools. So there was definitely an element of racism in it. However, as MAYO our focus was on the administration which was run, the administration at that time, the Board of Education had been packed was run basically by an organization that had taken over the school district. An organization called Committee for Good Schools [actually, Citizens for Good Schools]. And basically what they were, they were liberal to moderate people who felt that, I guess, that what they were doing was right. We felt that it was wrong. I remember going with a group of the MAYO people to a school board meeting at which a riot basically broke out.

EV: I was going to ask you that…but before you go any further, when… do you remember that being Citizens for Good Schools?

CC: Citizens for Good Schools.

EV: Right. And who was with you in MAYO at the time?

CC: That was Gregory Salazar who was the captain, Yolanda and Walter Birdwell, Gloria Rubec and her husband Alex.

EV: Wasn't Poncho Ruiz a member?

CC: Yes, Poncho Ruiz, who is now deceased.

EV: Yeah I heard that.

CC: And I just found a video with him.

EV: Oh really?

CC: I saw a video he did years ago. Anyway, we were a bunch of crazy kids and we were…

EV: Excuse me how did Yolanda, because I know looking back there she was very young at the time. And I thought she was older than she was but she was kind of still a kid herself wasn't she? I mean she was like her mid-twenties.

CC: She was very young she was married to a postal carrier named Walter.

EV: He was my postman. I lived in West University about four or five blocks from them. And that was his area so he used to come by and…

CC: And deliver the mail.

EV: Deliver the mail, yeah.

CC: Anyway, there was basically a riot that broke out and I don't really remember too much of it because it was very hectic but I was arrested, put in hand cuffs and taken out of the front of the building in hand cuffs, along with eight others, to the… in front of television cameras and the next day we were called "the Houston Nine." And so "The Houston Nine" became a rallying point. Everyone, you know, because they wanted to charge us with several felonies and put us all away. And so we got this attorney, a pro bono attorney, I forget that guy's name he was so good. He died piloting his private plane back from Louisiana with his girlfriend. I can't remember his name but he was very good. He said, "These people want to screw you around but I'm going to screw them." So what he said, "I'm going to do a political strategy on them and they won't know what hit them." Essentially, I don't understand the law that much, but this is what happened: We were charged in city courts, municipal court with disorderly conduct. We were charged with several felonies, felony riot all kinds of stuff. Those were state

charges, district court. So somehow he took us into court, he took us to trial on the misdemeanors. We were found on the disorderly conduct we were found guilty. And we were… the charges were, we were sentenced to time served. We had just spent several days in the Harris County Jail. The old, old Harris County Jail that had a trustee, that had a trustee system. It was amazing place, I'd never been jail. I don't think I had ever been to jail before, I was a kid. We were found guilty of disorderly conduct. They turned around and took us to District Court and the day of the trial of the first felony charge of District Court our attorney said, "Check this out." The prosecutor walks up and he says, "I want to talk to you in the Judge's chambers." They went into his chambers. And he told the prosecutor and the Judge, "You can't try these people they have already been found guilty of this charge therefore if you try them on this charge it is double jeopardy." So it can't be done.

EV: Do you know who the judge was?

CC: I don't remember.

EV: Do you want me to explain to you what happened?

CC: Well yeah, it was interesting because all I know is they came out of the chambers and our attorney had a giant smile on his face and those two guys were pissed because… so what happened?

EV: Well what happened back then, the laws have changed since then. When you have multiple offenses that come from the same act the state had the choice, the state meaning the entire prosecution whether it was city, state or county or whatever. They has a choice, the prosecutorial branch had the choice on which case the were going to try you on. So because they chose to accept your guilty plea on the misdemeanor while you had

state charges, felony charges, they had in effect carved out the misdemeanor charge to charge you on. They should have dropped that one and then done this other one. See we used to do this with DWIs. They would charge you with DWI and then maybe give you a speeding ticket. Well we caught the guy for the speeding ticket and you couldn't get him for the DWI because it came out of the same act.

CC: Right.

EV: So they chose which one they are going to prosecute you on. So the minute they carved out, even though one didn't know what the other one was doing, they carved and said, "Okay we'll take the plea on this" it was double jeopardy. So that's what happened it was a wonderful move that he made it was a good move. (laughter)

CC: Well they don't do that anymore right?

EV: No they changed the law.

CC: Thank God! Thank God!

EV: Yeah keep these guys behind bars, right?

CC: Well we walked out of there and we had a good time.

EV: So that was Gregory…

CC: Gregory Salazar, Gregory Salazar was part of that.

EV: Somebody… okay.

CC: Gregory of course died of AIDS later. He was…

EV: I was there that night.

CC: The night he died?

EV: No I was there the night the riot took place.

CC: Oh you were.

EV: I had that one year, my last year of law school where I was working for the school system. And but that's my story. We're talking about yours right now.

CC: Well I don't know I don't know where to continue. I think…

EV: Well I was leading you into the thing about how you got involved into the movement. Now after that…

CC: So I'm up in Delano and I was basically hitchhiking around and didn't have a place to stay. So Cesar said, "Why don't you stay at the forty acres?" No we were at the forty acres. "Why don't you stay at Filipino Hall?" Well Filipino Hall was just this giant auditorium. And it was a hiring hall. And the union was running it. Back then…and before the union had run it it was an actual grower's hiring hall but the union had somehow taken it over and it was their property. The Forty Acres was a fascinating place. I talked to some union people here recently, they don't know anything about it. I, maybe it is closed. There was an old lady, an elderly lady who died in Delano and she deeded 40 acres of land to the union and on this forty acres, that's why they called it the Forty Acres and on this land they built a clinic, a wonderful modern clinic, brand new brick and glass, modern building The Walter Ruther, named it after the great UAW labor leader. Clinic and they had health services for migrant workers there for *campesinos*, for farm workers. They had a school… they had, it was the center of union activity, it was wonderful. So I went over to Philippino Hall and I walk in there and I had a sleeping bag so I started sleeping on the stage in the back of the stage they had a little stage, a big stage. And I started going to boycott school. Boycott school was pretty incredible. They would bring in idealistic college students from all over the United States to come to this school during their summer break, for a month or two or whatever…

EV: Who was "they?" I'm sorry…

CC: The United Farm Workers. And then they would send them out to cities all over the Untied States just to run boycott activities. To try to get lettuce out of grocery stores, out of all over. It was pretty amazing. Met a lot of young kids. Kids my age. You know we are all idealistic. Lot of wonderful girls. Had a great time.

EV: Yeah.

CC: Yeah. Anyway, the highlight of that was that every Friday night we would have a big, like a big gathering at Filipino Hall everyone would come there and we would basically…it would be a party there would be Cesar would come and give a talk and others would get up and speak and people would play music and there would be lots of food and we would have some beverages. And it would be… it was like a social. It was wonderful. And Cesar would say, "I have a guest that's come up from L.A." The place with incredible entertainers, movie stars would come and you would get to meet them. I remember the night Phil Oaks came, the great folks singer, oh man that was great! One night I'm there and Cesar says, "I have a friend of mine come up he's going to play, and entertain us a little bit." It was Paul Simon.

EV: Oh really? Wow!

CC: Now at that time Paul Simon had probably the #1 hit in the United States a song called, "Like a Bridge Over Troubled Water." And he got up there, got out his guitar and he played that. And it was…I mean,

EV: Brought down the house.

CC: Oh man you could hear a pin drop. It was incredible. Things like that. It just amazing. I left there and this is kind of interesting because it was sort of like the activism

tour. I had been in L.A. Well I forgot to tell you why I went to L.A. I went to L.A. to work on the Chicano Moratorium. Rosalio Muñoz was organizing this giant march of organizing the Mexican-American community against the draft and against the war. And I worked there and I told them I'm going back to Houston and organize a Moratorium there. Rosalio still to this day is a friend of mine. He was the UCLA college, he was the UCLA student body president the first Mexicano elected to the UCLA student body president and he was the president and he refused induction and was going to go to prison for five years except he had the foresight to go out and get an attorney to represent him named Michael Tiger. So at that time Michael Tiger was the best. I mean he was like I don't know if Michael Tiger is still around but he was like a legendary defense attorney and he is like Dick De Guerin. You know, no matter what they charge you with if you get Dick De Guerin you're not going to spend any time in jail. And Michael Tiger was that good and Michael Tiger got him off eventually and he didn't have to go. But Rosalio became the focus of this giant anti-war movement based in the Latino community and I went out there to get involved in that and I helped him. That's how I met David Sanchez of the Brown Berets. And that's how I went and we had a leading up to a giant rally against the war in east L.A.

That was the march that was after I had left. We had a big rally. "I said, I'm going back to Houston, before I go to Houston I'm going to go up and see Cesar." So I went up and saw Cesar, I left there and I go to San Francisco. I get to the Bay Area, this is all within a period of a maybe six or seven or eight months in late '69 into 1970. I get to San Francisco I get on a subway of some sort. I go out to San Francisco State College and there is a strike. A very famous strike. They had, _____ (15.1) was

the school president and he was a complete crazy man. And the Third World Liberation Front, it was a very interesting organization made up of all nationalities, all ethnic groups and very, very radical, very, very left and that strike at San Francisco State of course turned into a war. I mean it was basically a war. I went over to Berkley I met a bunch of really interesting people at Berkley. I get to Berkley and I go to, Berkley of course is attached, you know it borders Oakland and I met Froben Lozada who was a Chicano Studies instructor.

EV: What was his name?

CC: Froben Lozada. Lozada, L-O-Z-A-D-A. He was the Chicano language instructor at Merit College at Oakland and of course, I had basically been just doing this. I didn't have any money, any job. I mean I didn't have…

EV: I was going to ask you if you were traveling under the office of the UAW?

CC: No I was traveling out of the offices of my pocket.

EV: Your pocket eh?

CC: Which was quickly running out of cash. I mean I hitchhiked from Pasadena to L.A. I don't know with maybe $20, $30 bucks in my pocket. You know and I didn't want to spend any money. Well by the time I ended up in Oakland I was broke. I go and I meet Forben Lozada at some rally or some political gathering and he says, "You're from Houston?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "I'm from Donna originally." And I said, "Wow." And I started telling him about all these things I had done.

EV: Donna?

CC: Donna, Texas, it's in the valley.

EV: Oh okay.

CC: And that's where he is from originally. I'm going to Google him today and find out what ever happened to him, anyway the point is I said to him, "Well I'm here in Oakland…" And I said, he started asking a bunch of questions. I told him about MAYO, the activities, everything we had done and about my activities with the Chicano Moratorium. He says, "Look, I'll tell you what I'm going to do: I'm going to hire you to be lecturer in the Mexican-American Studies Department here in Merit. You come and talk to my students and you spend an hour with them and they will ask you questions and you give them all this stuff and we'll pay you $50." I said, "Wow, that's great!" Ronald Regan was governor, remember he was line-item vetoing things like radical stuff at campuses. I said, "How are you getting around that?" He said, "We have a way of getting around it. Don't worry about it. This guy isn't hurting us at all." I said, "Wow that is interesting, Ronald Regan." So I went in there and those people treated me like a rock and roll star. He said, "I have today here an invited speaker. He is actually a real live breathing activist from Texas." All these kids looked at me. "You're from Texas?" Because to them Texas was a place of huge repression. It was like being a Jew from Nazi Germany or something. I mean their ideas were pretty strange about what was going on in Texas. They considered it an incredibly horrible repressive place. So I did about 2 or 3 lectures, he gave me $150. And back then, you know, I had… that was big money back then!

EV: Oh yeah.

CC: And so, you know, and not only that but he gave me a card, he gave me this coupon book and I would go into the Merit College cafeteria and eat breakfast and lunch. It was wonderful. You know and I would just give them a coupon out of the book. And

then on weekends we would have to figure out what do because we had no money. So we would starve on weekends but that was okay. So I'm riding around with him and one day he says to me, "Hey the political science department at the University of California at Berkley wants you to come over there and talk to their graduate political science classes. They will pay you like $100." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yeah." So we walked over to Berkley, I mean we go over there and sure enough. I mean here I am a kid, you know, and I'm lecturing to graduate students at the University of California at Berkley in political science department, I'm a guest lecturer. So I tell people, "I've been a guest lecturer at UC Berkley." (laughter) And I get a couple of those. Then I started feeling… you know I'm becoming a professional militant. And I just, I mean I need to get back in the trenches, I'm tired of this crap. So I left Berkley and I hitchhiked to Denver, Colorado in time to attend the Crusade for Justice Youth Rally and I met Corky [Gonzalez]. It was just incredible. I mean there were Latino activists there from all over the country, all over and it was just wonderful to be with them and meet with them and talk with them and it was just, you know it was like… Friday night we got there and they showed a film. And I don't know who thought of this film but it was it was The Battle of Algiers. I don't know if you have ever seen that movie or whatever but it is basically about the struggle of an oppressed dark people, the Algerian, against the white power structure, the French. And I mean it just hit a raw nerve and everybody just went nuts. It's a great movie. A revolutionary movie.

EV: What was that name again?

CC: The Battle of Algiers. Probably the greatest movie ever made by Gillo Pontecorvo. Anyway, of course, after that, times were… it was over. And all this time

while I'm doing all this MAYO had taken over a church. They had occupied the San Marcos Presbyterian church on [Houston's] North Side. They had broken in and they and they had occupied the church because they wanted the Episcopal church to turn the building over to the community as a community center and because it had been sitting there boarded up for many years. And of course the hierarchy wouldn't do that. So they went in there and broke in, took over the church, occupied it, walking around with shot guns and stuff, invited a police confrontation. And by the time I had come back, by the time I got back to Houston, although I did run into Gregory and a couple of other people in Denver, they had gone up there, by that time I returned to Houston all that was over. So MAYO played a very big part in that. I never did get in to that part of the action.

EV: So at the end of your Forrest Gump activities… (laughter) meeting all these famous activities, you came back home and then did you, were you here, weren't you here when we had that demonstration in front of the Shamrock Hotel?

CC: I don't know, for what?

EV: Well we had, they had a… that's when they promised Al Hernandez, Nixon had a federal bench and that's when a lot of these Chicano business men also became Republicans in support of that. But you know Nixon, in his favor, he appointed Spanish speaking at cabinet level position, which none of the Democrats have ever recognized. But anyway, no we just had, we had a break…

CC: I wasn't there for that.

EV: Okay.

CC: But I did come back and immediately start working on the Chicano Moratorium which we had a giant march here in Houston that culminated at Hidalgo Park in

Magnolia. And we had about, we had over 1,000 people marching against the war in Vietnam.

EV: Well we had, there was also the one, lets see the Shamrock, the Evelyn. Lets see, there was a meeting at U of H with Yolanda when she was with the Brown Berets and she got that same group of Republicans, that was part of the Shamrock. I guess so you missed that one, so yeah you missed that one. I think that was '70 or '71 because I forget, I think it was before 1970, 71. Yeah. Okay.

CC: Well in the early '70s all this activism began to wane. And I'm not sure why. Certainly the problems are still here, to this today. Things that people were motivated by, there was a very big, you know, change was in the air. Things were happening. Things were beginning to open up. More and more, you know. Texas was becoming less and less of what it used to be when I grew up and there was much more opportunity.

EV: Well do you think that perhaps the elections of David [Lopez] or Leonel [Castillo] and all of this appointment of principals of in HISD, teachers more, do you think that might have been like a safety valve and it got deflated and that stuff?

CC: I think that was something, I don't know but I think that was going to have to happen anyway. I mean our current superintendent is a Latino. I mean I was here talking to this guy here last week about a documentary about the opening up of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. You know the beginnings of the Tejano Committee. You know twenty years ago Mexicans were not welcome there. Now they welcome us with open arms. And a lot… to tell you the truth that is a very good example. I'll tell you why. Twenty years ago, twenty five years ago the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, their directors were all white. And they basically were in a mindset of, you know,

"We've been doing this since whenever and we're going to keep doing this until, forever. Because that is just the way it is." Well, but they are not idiots. I mean they at some point entered the modern times and started doing computer runs on demographics. And they realized right away that in Harris County Texas the Latino is the exploding population group, not the Anglo and not the black and not the Oriental. So therefore they made the decision, not that they… they didn't open their arms and their doors to the Latino community out of love, they did it basically out of economics. You know all that thing with Selena and all of that, the Go Tejano Committee, all that was done basically because they came to see, I mean they can count. They may not love all the races but they know how to count.

EV: Well [Luis] Cano was involved in that.

CC: Cano was very much involved in that.

EV: And he told me that they kicked him off the committee.

CC: Of course.

EV: Because he was carrying on about this… I think it was the division of the scholarship money or something.

CC: Right. They took away the ability of the Go Tejano Committee to separately and selectively award scholarships to Latino students. Now that doesn't mean that Latino students don't get scholarships. They put in a mechanism to deal with that but they thought it was getting a little bit out of hand. They didn't want these people… what they were afraid of was that they had built this huge monster, this huge Latino pride monster and they were afraid that eventually it would break away and start its own thing and they wanted to keep it within the fold. So they, as using their terminology, they wanted to rein

it in. (laughter) And that's exactly what they did. (laughter) But you know, you're talking about something that, I don't know I was born in 1949, I have gone through a lot of different things. I've seen first hand, you know, incredible racism, segregation and now we are talking here, we're talking 2006 and I can definitely say, as can anyone that is observant, that there is many, many things that have changed. You know, I mean one of the purposes of my doing the documentary about Latino power in Houston is the fact, that for example, Leonel Castillo who I met as a kid marching, later became the first city-wide elected official in the city, the first Latino City Controller or Latino anything. Now we, within ten years, and it's not just me saying this, I mean, again the computers say it. The demographics analysis say it, we will be the majority, the Latino will be the majority in Houston and Harris County by, within… well by the year 2020. Now, what implications does this carry, or does it carry any implications? I believe it does. Not only do I believe that it has incredible implications, I also believe that no one is talking about it. That's what I want to do, I want to talk about it.

EV: Well what implications do you think it carries?

CC: Well the mayor will be a Latino. The police chief will be a Latino, the majority of the city counsel will be Latinos. In other words, the political power structure will be a Latino political power structure. The implications that I think that that carries is enormous. What does that, first of all what does that really mean? And the reason I say, I put it like that, is because the Latinos in this city have incredible purchasing power but in terms of economic power, that is, concentrated, it is not very much, not that I can tell. I mean we have, we have Latino millionaires, we have Latino professionals at all levels but relative to the power structure we don't really own anything. Right now the President

of the United States is George W. Bush. There are about probably 22 to 30 rich and older white men who basically run and control everything in this state. And frankly most of them are in Houston, there's a few in Dallas. But if you were to shoot all of them today that would basically undermine the Bush administration because that's what, what his administration is built on, is support from these power entities. And so therefore we don't have anything like that. We don't have… I can not point to a single Mexican-American or Latino individual that is on that level in this city. Maybe I'm wrong. But you ask about implications…

EV: Right.

CC: Implications in the political realm have enormous implications in the economic realm. But only, implications to better our community but only if political power is applied to the right spot in the right way.

EV: Well that's, I guess that is what I am about to ask: Do you think that the influence of political power is strong enough, is so strong that any Mexicanos or Latinos will reach that level will be perverted by that power? Or do you think that the inertia of the Chicano movement which you said is not pretty much dead but to want the Latino community as whole or are, or will that carry us through or do we just become brown Anglos?

CC: I do not know. I cannot answer that question but I will tell you this: that question will definitely never have an answer unless we start talking about it. And talking about it now.

EV: Okay now let me come back a little bit. I, from my experiences in teaching, in my experiencing at U of H with the Chicano students and Mexican-Americans, I see the same enthusiasm but I see there's an enclave trying to bust into the Anglo establishment

rather than, and I could be very wrong here, rather than a continuation of the movement or the revolution, maybe quieter or maybe more subtle. That's not to say they are not involved because they were very involved in these last demonstrations that we have had now for the immigration, for the migrants. But they have, I sense a very arm's length relationship with the movement even though they study it, they look at very proud and they probably build some icons out of it that I don't particularly agree with, like the pachucos, I hated those guys when I was in school. But anyway they see all these things in different perspectives. And I think that they study the movement at a very arm's length. But like you're saying, these kids look at you and they say, "What was that all about? I don't understand what you guys were so pissed off about." Well it was a different world.

CC: Well I always saw it, and I don't know why and I don't even know that we talked about this one, I always saw it as, not only as a renaissance, but a renaissance of what, we're really talking about, you know we are only one Latino people. To me, I mean it's just me. We are one Latino people from Patagonia to Chicago to Alaska. And, you know, back then what I mean by that is that if you look at Latin America today, see and not very many people do that, I mean not many people Latinos living in Houston, Texas or Mexican-Americans, they don't, I don't think, look to Latin America as being something for which to draw direction, inspiration or whatever. You know, as a kid when I got in the movement of course John F. Kennedy was still alive. We looked to him. We looked to things that were going on that were very, very different character that what you would think kids growing up here would grow up on studying George Washington and Daniel Boone and Lewis and Clarke. Sure we were Americans, and yes

were are very proud to be Americans. But we have a different aspect and character to us as well. I think for politics. What is the point I'm trying to get to you? What is this continent, this hemisphere? If you look around it becomes pretty clear right away that the main objective is redistribution of wealth. Whether you are talking about what is going on with Venezuela, or in Peru or in some parts of Central America, no one is talking about that here. And of course it's true that the rich in this country are getting richer by the moment and the poor are getting poorer and it's not getting talked about. It's being talked about in the halls of congress to some degree when they talk about universal health care, things like that. That is really wealth distribution. So the power elite will always fight that. I don't know really that… I think that when I was 17 or 18 years old one of the great regrets that I had was that for a while I bought into this whole idea about it's "us versus them." I don't really look at it that way now. I mean, I think, I mean you say Latinos, you say Mexicanos, well I mean, genetics, the size of genetics has taken us to a certain level. We are all the same. I mean you and I are really brothers because 250,000 years ago we are decedent from a woman that lived at that time in Ethiopia. So not only are we're Latinos, yes, and do we have certain cultural pride? Of course, but really we are Africans. We are African people. I am an African. Africa is my mother land, Africa is my root. Now you tell that to certain Mexicans in this city or Mexicanos or conservative Latin-Americans and… or you tell them that Africa is their mother land they look at you like your nuts. You see, so in other words, I guess what I'm trying to say is that we're the same.

EV: Let me throw this into the pot since we are talking about it. I have sat down with many indigenous people, I say four or five, different from Mexico and New Mexico and

we have discussed this same point and they pretty much… of course they don't have the written language so their history comes out of old traditions. Their old traditions say, "who the hell says we came from over there, we came from here." They have the idea of coming up from the earth and all of that. So we don't have that grandmother in Africa.

CC: Yeah they didn't cross the land bridge, but of course they did.

EV: Well, yeah we know they did.

CC: We know they did because we have genetics to prove it.

EV: Exactly. Now, but in here they don't see it that way. And so there's a wonderful book by a guy by the name of Guillermo Batalla, named "Mexico Profundo" have you ever read it? And then a guy by the name of de la Madrid at the University of New Mexico narrated another Chicano photographer did this on "Nuevo Mexico Profundo" and took the same theory. The theory is that the European concept that tries to impose itself upon the Native American concept is still an ongoing battle. And it has never ended. My personal idea is that traces of that remains in all of us. Even though we are, you and I are to a great degree Anglo sized or assimilated into Texas…

CC: Into this society.

EV: Right so we're not all Mexican and, but we still carry an awful lot of that with us. Now how much of that, how much of that that we preserved of the Mexican is part of this Mexicano Profundo thing? Because back in the '60s and '70s we were, the thing was the Indian background was what we touted the most.

CC: Right.

EV: You know…

CC: We were trying to return to our indigenous roots.

EV: Exactly. Remember Leo Tanguma had that thing that he painted…

CC: Right.

EV: What ever happened to Leo Tanguma do you know?

CC: He moved to Denver.

EV: Did he really?

CC: He is in Denver and is a successful commercial artist.

EV: Oh good. The, but I think sometimes I think I'm holding on, I keep holding on to things of my past. Because I don't feel like I've…. Sometimes I think the kids behind me haven't snapped yet so it is kind of a long going battle and I don't know whether it is because I'm getting older or maybe I'm brilliant. I don't know. I have tendency to think it is the former I'm just getting old. I think everyone ought to be agreeing with me. But my sense is that the Latino, this movement that we now have that we have gone from Chicano to Hispanic that there is a lot… and it is an interesting thing that is probably going to come about. Although we didn't anticipate this in the '60s and the '70s. I don't think we anticipated the influx of people coming in from Latin America and Central America and the wars that started all the refugees coming in here. You almost can't say Chicano anymore because it is pretty much an obsolete term so we do the Latino or Hispanic thing. Do you sense any kind of a difference between the Hispanic thing or the Mexican thing, do you know what I'm saying. Is it an important difference? You talk about the uniformity of the…

CC: To me if there is a difference, to me it's not of any consequence.

EV: Okay.

CC: I think people are people. I think, you know, since I have now realized that I am related to everyone in the world and I mean it took me a while to figure that out, to throw away old ideas, to look at things with new eyes. I think we have to come to a point to where we are and then work from that point. So that's what I'm trying to do now. On the other hand there are things that are just so interesting to me like this whole thing about Latino political power….

EV: That's a path thing.

CC: Because obviously someone once said, it's all economics, and of course it is. And that… as technology advances and as economic wealth becomes concentrated in less and less hands which is happening by the second, all of these things have implications that we need to think about and try and figure out. I don't know. We basically… this country is turning into a monolithic it seems to have turned into a monolithic political situation. I mean what happened to the Democratic Party?

EV: They shot themselves in the foot?

CC: I mean…

EV: Actually I think they shot themselves in the heart. I mean seriously I think the Democratic Party has just stumbled all over itself but that's my opinion. But you're right I think that the political realization and I have a feeling that.. instead of me saying, do you sense that there might be a sociological change or economic change that will change this or is it going to be like a big pimple that busts in terms of the economic thing? It's got to stop somewhere.

CC: Yeah, I don't know. I mean, I think when I was 18 years old and involved in all these radical movements I didn't really think about this as an economic movement. I

didn't… to us it was a movement for justice, for social change and to rejuvenate our cultural background. Now all those things sound like really wonderful things. But really what do they really accomplish what do they really mean?

EV: Well they gave us the identity.

CC: Yeah the identity. Well the identity thing was okay. Okay, fine. So now you know who you are, now what do you?

EV: Exactly.

CC: So you know, if you'd had told me when I was 19 that everything I was doing was basically for not except to give people an identity and then we had to work on the economic situation I would have thought you were crazy. But I mean there you go. Identity. Well I don't know identity? I mean we are all African people.

EV: Well but we didn't know that then. Well we were trying to bring up the education, we were trying to open up jobs. You remember UOIC, remember UOIC?

CC: Yeah.

EV: So we had some guys come in from Humble Exxon and they gave us, the Mexicano guys who were in mid-management was as far as they can get. And they came in started giving us all the statistics and then we started boycotting Exxon and everyone that was there turned in their Exxon credit cards until they started opening up. But again, economic, you show them economic and all that begins to change. So now we have Mexicanos running major law firms or they are junior partners at major law firms. There are… all major corporations have Latinos in them, they may be Cubanos or they may be Puerto Ricanos or something, and some are Mexican-Americans. I think there has been a big change. I'm just trying to find out, I'd like to find out from you at some point, you

have an appointment coming up right. Didn't you have an appointment? Because I've got, I just finished page 1 of my questions. (laughter)

CC: What time is it?

EV: It is now 11:00.

CC: Yeah I do have an appointment.

EV: So…

CC: That's okay, let's keep going.

EV: Alright. Then I…

CC: What's the next question? Are you kidding? How many questions do you have?

EV: I've got about 39 or 40.

CC: Really, what are we on now?

EV: I don't know I was just… they are really.

CC: Seems like you have been talking a lot.

End Side B, tape 2.

EV: And do you know where he has it in Denver?

CC: I don't know where he is in Denver but I will say this, I know he is a semi-successful commercial artist because as you may or may not know or remember here about a year and a half ago, or here relatively recently, Denver inaugurated a brand new airport, sparkling brand new airport that they built and he was one of the artists given a commission to create art for the airport.

EV: Really?

CC: So when you land in Denver and you walk around you are going to see Leo Tanguma work. So they only commission your better know and your more commercially inclined artist for that kind of work.

EV: Yeah. Well I didn't know and I always wondered what happened to him.

CC: He's still into art, still doing public art.

EV: Good for him.

CC: Hopefully he's making a little money at it. Other than that I don't know.

EV: Well I know he had a … I remember he designed that tri-face that we use on everything. Anyway, so how… so after your militant era, your real activist era, you became… did you how did you get involved with Canal 45, or what was in between?

CC: I worked for a long time in Spanish language television doing all kinds of programs, variety shows, comedy shows, music video shows.

EV: As a director, what did you…?

CC: Producing, directing, yeah all of that. I've done all of that.

EV: Local programming?

CC: Local programming yeah. I did one pilot for Univision but nothing much came of it.

EV: Were you freelancing is that…

CC: Yeah.

EV: And when you freelance is that what…what is it a case by case basis or show by show or something?

CC: Yeah pretty much. I mean, yeah I did several series. I did a thing called (unintelligible) which was a series. In fact I produced that show in about twenty markets all over the United States.

EV: Really?

CC: And then we did a thing here called _____ (In Spanish) which is a music and variety show and just things like that, all kinds of very forgettable television.

EV: (laughter). So how did you start getting into your memorable television?

CC: Well I haven't gotten into that yet.

EV: Oh you're on your way?

CC: I came to TBH about six or seven years ago. I knew Richard Reyes, of course for years. I did a documentary in 1984 _____ (2.9)which is about the beginning of a low rider movement in Houston. How the low rider movement began here in Houston. I found the very first one, the very first guy that was a low rider that did it. It went from there and Richard Reyes was part of that. But of course I knew Richard before then I think I met Richard in like 1980. Yeah he was over here and I came over here to see him and we talked about doing things and we basically and I came over here and started doing first under the auspices of the Texas Commission for the Arts as an artist in education program resident artist here. And then when that program got cut I've been here I guess for a couple of years under the auspices of the Southwest Alternate Media Project which is kind of the same kind of thing I'm still and artist educator, artist and resident educator.

EV: Were they the ones funding what you are doing?

CC: Yeah they fund what I do. I'm not an employee here.

EV: You are not what?

CC: I am not an employee here. I do not work here for this organization I am basically housed here.

EV: Okay but you know something about the Chicano theater and some of it's history and all of that?

CC: Yeah a little bit, yeah.

EV: You say Richard Reyes, is he the one who initially got all this started?

CC: No Richard, the _____ began as _____ I guess maybe in 1970, '69 at Ripley house as an organization to present Spanish language and bilingual theatre. Our current Artist director, Jorge Pena was one of the founding members. It was basically founded by a guy by the name of Arnold _____ who now lives in Miami, he is a social worker and he was working at Ripley house and by, surprising enough, by an Indian mystic, a man from India, a holy man, a mystic named Yakifa Heatfh. And it's a strange story how it got started. One day Yakifa landed in Houston he was dressed…

EV: How do you spell his name?

CC: Yakifa, Y-A-K-I-F-A.

EV: And the last name?

CC: Heatfh, H-E-A-T-F-H he was a… he landed in Houston and he was at the port somehow and he started trying to find his way into downtown and he came to the Second Ward and he ended up walking and the kids, some kids they thought he was weird looking because he was, he was dressed in his Indian robes and garb and he may or may not have worn a turban I don't know but the point is they didn't understand, they started throwing rocks at him and stuff. He finally find his way into a bar over here and, and he

was having a beer and so they started talking. He told him about his experiences as a little kid. He said, "Yeah these kids, they need something to do. They are out looking for trouble." So they decided to start an organization for kids that could come and they could, I mean Teatro Bilingue de Houston. And that's basically how it was born. And they had a big meeting and the kids at the first… you know it is interesting because he's like, he's like a W. Fard character. Do you know who that was? Fard?

EV: No.

CC: Fard was this guy, you know the Nation of Islam was founded by the Honorable Elijah Mohammad. He began the Nation of Islam when this mystical character named Fard showed up somehow and gave him the tablets or gave him these documents that talked about the beginnings so he began this organization called the Nation of Islam and grew it into a giant organization. Well about two or three years after that happened Fard disappeared and has not been seen since. So that's what happened to Yakifa Heatfh he came, got involved with Arnold, got the thing started and then one day he just simply disappeared.

EV: Really?

CC: Yeah. It's like no one knows what happened to him, if he went back to India. Now, you know he was an Indian holy man, according to _____ (7.2) he would bring the kids together and the kids would look at him because you know they had never seen anyone like that you know in the second ward before. It was outside of their experience and they would say, "Arnold, is he Mexicano?" Arnold would say, "_____" and they would say, "_____." You know it was one of those things that you just kind of.

EV: Yeah.

CC: Well anyway. So and then Richard I think, Richard Reyes was the third or fourth person hired and then eventually after everyone had kind of left off to go do other things he was left so he became the director. And a lot of people thought that he started it. And of course he never corrected that impression so… (laughter) there you go.

EV: Why would you?

CC: There you go!

EV: Well now what's… in your independent or your freelancing work what has been the focus of that work?

CC: The focus of that independent industry work in radio, television and film, the focus of that is to make money.

EV: Well number one…

CC: So that I can eat. Oh well I mean, interesting enough you ask something that's kind of interesting, there is a film festival here in Houston called the _____ Film Festival ran by Jesus _____ (8.5) you may know him, _____.

EV: _____ (In Spanish).

CC: _____. Yeah he started a film festival. So he came over here to get films from me. He said, "I want to show your early films." So he showed my documentary called, "El Be Bop Kid, The Life of Freddy Fender." Freddy Fender is an old friend of mine. I did four or five films… and of course I did the famous documentary, "The Case of José Compos Torres." I did that in '77. I had my reporter in that was John Quinones who now works for Prime Time Live.

EV: Yeah. Was he…is he from here?

CC: No he's from San Antonio but he was working here and I gave him his first job in television. Anyway, John was here. So we would show some of these early works of mine in his film festival and I would come and talk about him. I think we were showing "The Case of Jose Campos Tores" when someone in the audience asked, "Well you know…" and they had also seen _____, (9.6) my '84 documentary, "it's been over 20 years since you've made a film." And I said, "Well yes." And they asked me, "Why." And I said, "Well because making a film is a lot of work, it's a lot of stress, it's like fighting a war, you're the general and it's incredibly time consuming and stressful and very difficult to make a movie in my experience. You know a good one. So that's why I haven't… Plus you have to make it on something that you are interested in, something that really is vital and important to you or else you're not going to put the time and the effort needed to do it, to do it correctly. So in twenty years I have not really felt strongly enough about a subject matter to do that." So after the whole thing was over and everyone had left and everything I was thinking to myself I said, "Well you know that was a good thing I told that guy but of course it was bull shit." So I said, "Maybe I ought to look around and see if there is something that I would like to do a film on that I think is vital and interesting, something that would really motivate me." So that's why I'm working on this thing now about Latino political power. It's going to be a documentary, it's going to be something like what Michael Moore would do, in other words I want to make something… I want to make a comedy. I want to make something, I want to make a documentary on Latino political power in Houston and the future, the past, present and future and I want it to make you laugh. I want to make a comedy but I also want it to

make you think. See so those two are very difficult to put together. Something that makes you laugh and think too. So that's my focus right now.

EV: Who's doing your… are you going to be the Michael Moore role?

CC: Well I think I am. Even though I fought it for a long time but I will be the narrator. I'll talk about the political wars. I'll talk about my experiences with Ben Reyes and all that kind of stuff.

EV: You're a Benny man…

CC: Benny Maldonado… Little John Castillo.

EV: Yeah little John.

CC: I call him Little John. _____ (11.6) calls him, our past counsel member, _____ calls him little John. You know why… but us old timers, you know why we call him little John?

EV: No.

CC: Because in PASSO we had a big John and little John. Big John was a precinct judge over precinct 9. What was that's guy's last name? Anyway, he was big John and so to differentiate we would call little John.

EV: Was that John a republican?

CC: No, no… he was very active in PASSO. You know a lot of these people have passed on. When I came to PASSO most of the guys… I was about the only kid there. The rest of them were grown men with families in their forties and fifties. And this is 1968. Tony Marron had a… I don't know what it was he ran a shop over here on Canal, he's sold clothes, God I guess it was a second hand store is what he ran. And after Leoneal Castillo he was the second guy I met and so this Tony Marron has a shop down

there. I'll never forget walking into his shop. You know after I had gone to a PASSO meeting or two just to see what… I walked in there and he said, "Hi." And he sat down, of course he had no business, nobody would go in there to buy anything. You know… after all this is the time when the malls were beginning. And before Wal-Mart showed up but I mean nobody was going into these little shops, I don't know how the guy made dollar one. I walked in there and he sat down and I sat down and he offered me a Coke. And then he just started telling me things. I mean just out of the blue. He said, "We're screwed. We have no political power. We don't care, we don't register to vote. These are things…" I mean he gave me civics 101. It was kind of interesting coming from this guy whose like, maybe in his mid forties, got a wife, got a family, lives in second ward and he just started telling me all this stuff. I said, "This is interesting." I guess he was trying to tell me why he was doing what he was doing. Now there is a park named after him. Go figure! Think they will name a park after me someday?

EV: Probably man.

CC: Maybe an outhouse.

EV: After this. Maybe a little park, a lot of mirrors…a lot of mirrors. I'm trying to relate to your comedic attitude with the slant on this movie.

CC: I was at the rally last Monday where there were 20,000 at Memorial park and I saw Maria Jimenez and I gave her a big hug and I said, "Isn't it a beautiful day?" And she said, "Yes." But she didn't say it… she was of course very tired so she didn't have a lot of energy to say yes. But then I realized what was going on. It was interesting. Another interesting thing is the dynamics. Okay. This happens in every movement. Right now we are in the beginnings of a huge political movement for refugee rights. And

so what's going on? All the leadership is fighting. The leadership has decided to fight about who is going to control it and where they are going to take it and how they are going to get rid of the other people that want to do the same thing. So, but that isn't anything new. That happens in all great, in all huge movements that always happens. That's about the first thing that happens. People start to argue about who the leadership should be and the direction of the thing and people don't agree so they drop out or they form other movements.

EV: Other groups, yeah.

CC: Yeah so that's what's happening now. And I admire people like Maria Jimenez4) because she's not a Johnny come lately she's been doing this basically all her life. You know talk about immigrant rights she was doing and working for that 30, 40 years ago. Okay so there you go. And I don't know it's pretty interesting. Let's get back to this.

EV: Yeah. Oh didn't you think that, again, retrospectively, didn't you think that it was amazing that Leonel during that period of MAC and the MAYO movement and arguments… was able to hold those diverse groups together. I mean he had, Abraham Ramirez, remember Abraham was a pretty conservative guy. He was part of, as I recall, Sembradores de Amistad and LULAC and at the same time you have Gregory and you guys. And he was able to hold them together…

CC: To a point.

EV: Exactly.

CC: To a point.

EV: But to the point that it needed.

: Yeah, yeah….

EV: And then once… I was always amazed that they would do that because I would expect that all these guys would have been a _____ pass from the beginning.

CC: Well he held it together because he had a certain level of skills as an organizer and he was able to get people to work to put aside their differences and work on one thing.

EV: Exactly.

CC: I don't know. That to me isn't that big of a deal. I think he was trying to do something. He got it done. I don't know.

EV: I mean I just can't imagine, I was kind of amazed to go into some meeting and see Abraham Ramirez and Greg at the same table., Yolanda [Birdwell] and all the other people he had around him. I couldn't have done it. I was as about as right as I had gotten to my life back then but then the… okay the other thing that I wanted to get into here was: do you think, what do you foresee with your documentary and the plot that you put into your documentary, what do you envision that at the end when it's all over, what will be the issue you want people to think about it, what is it that you want them to think about?

CC: I want them to think about the little picture and the big picture. I want people to think about what all is this going to mean, in terms of the big picture, in terms of society. Because we are talking about Houston. We're really also talking about Texas and we're also talking about the Southwest because it is happening all over. And we're really talking about the heart of America. America, what's going to happen in America? And I want them also, not only to think about that, but also to think about, when I say the little picture, what can they do about it? What can they, can they be part of the solution? I

mean there is a solution there's a place we're all going and will they be part of that as opposed to being a part of the solution or the confusion. You know where do they want to go? So I don't think this, what I'm trying to do is a project that is going to have any answers but hopefully it will ask some interesting questions.

EV: Questions just to make people start thinking about answers rather than direction?

CC: Yeah. One of the reasons that this documentary is interesting is because I'm going to shoot part of it in Monterrey because I figure half the Mexicans in Houston are from Monterrey. Actually more than half of them are from Monterrey.

EV: Really?

CC: From what I've been able to understand. So what is it about Monterrey? Let's go there. Let's see if we can find some sort of kernel there, some sort of gist of what is happening there. I've never been to Monterrey have you?

EV: Oh yeah several times.

CC: I've never been there. I don't know that there is anything of a root that we can find. I mean I know all the jokes and stuff like that. So you know what I mean?

EV: Well yeah. You know it's funny my experience has been that there are a lot of people from San Luis Potosi I remember…

CC: That's where I'm from. That's where my people are from.

EV: Are they, then Monterrey? Then there's another one in Tamaulipas I can't think of the name right now. Anyway those are the ways that I see more people from there. San Luis Potosi. Anyway, those are the popular… you know when I was in the immigration law stuff.

Interruption

EV: Carlos I think that's it.

CC: Really?

EV: Well I could go on forever with this kind of stuff. Because it fascinates me and I think that…

CC: Well we hit a lot of different things.

EV: This is the end of this interview.