University of Houston
Oral History of Houston Project
Dr. Luis R. Cano

Interviewee: Dr. Luis R Cano

Interview Date: March 17, 2006

Place: Dr. Cano's office, Houston, Texas

Interviewer: Ernesto Valdes

Transcriber: Suzanne Mascola

Keywords: AMAA, Mexican, Mexican-American, Mexican heritage, heritage, Hispanic culture, Mexican culture, Latino culture, Latino, education, drop outs, HISD, Houston Independent School District, Houston, Houston school, University of Houston, Education, Austin High School, barrio, theater, satire, Chicano Communications Council, KPRC, broadcasting, television, shotgun squad, school board, march, advocacy, integration, segregation, hiring practices, MAYO, Mexican American Youth Organization, Catholicism, Mexican history, Mexican American history, Luis R. Cano, Ernesto Valdes, Cesar Chavez, communism, Ku Klux Klan, prejudice, media, television, heritage, indigenous, Native American, mestizo, Spanish, Hispanic,

Abstract:

Dr. Luis R. Cano reflects on his career as a teacher and an activist in Houston. Dr. Cano started a school funded by grants. With only $35,000 he employed two others, and taught drop outs from HISD. Because of sharp criticism aimed at HISD, the district moved to adopt the school, but Dr. Cano refused the offer. Simultaneously, he was a part of the Chicano Communications Council. While working for the council he increased the opportunities of Mexican-Americans, especially in the area of broadcast journalism. He recounts his childhood and what got him interested in race and culture. Dr. Cano tells the story of his grandfather, and how he stood up for the rights of his daughter to be educated in a normal school, and his fight with the Ku Klux Klan. He ends discussing Hispanic culture, music and history with Ernesto Valdes.

EV: This is Ernesto Valdes, the interviewer, and I am interviewing Dr. Luis Cano in his office located at 5206 Airline Drive. It is now 12:35. Is that your full name?

LRC: Yes, it is Luis R. Cano.

EV: O.K., and I have explained to you what the purpose of this interview is, is that correct?

LRC: Yes, sir.

EV: Would you mind giving us your date of birth?

LRC: August 25, 1948.

EV: O.K., and you were born where?

LRC: Corpus Christi, Texas.

EV: Did you attend public schools there?

LRC: I attended public schools in Corpus Christi.

EV: Through high school, I take it?

LRC: I graduated from Roy Miller High School in 1966.

EV: And then, where did you go to college?

LRC: I spent the first two years at Texas A&I in Kingsville, which is now, of course, Texas A&M in Kingsville. My last two years were at North Texas State in Denton and I graduated in 1970. And then from 1970 to 1973, I attended night school at Texas Southern University and received a master's in guidance and counseling. Then, in 1981, I completed my doctoral studies at the University of Houston in education administration.

EV: Did you have any military time?

LRC: No.

EV: After you got your degree, your doctorate, were you teaching at U of H or did you teach in public schools? What was your educational sequence of work?

LRC: Well, I was a high school teacher. From September of 1970 to January of 1973, I was a high school teacher at Austin High School.

EV: Here in Houston?

LRC: That is here in Houston, where I taught Mexican-American studies and English. And then, from 1973 to 1975, I did consulting work. Well, I also taught at the University of Houston part-time, from 1972 to 1976.

EV: What did you teach at U of H?

LRC: They were developing their Mexican-American studies program in 1972, so myself, Leonel Castillo, David Lopez were the first instructors they hired for the program there. And so, I was there from 1972 to 1976, but it was on a part-time basis.

EV: O.K., you were explaining about David and Leonel.

LRC: Well, they were starting the Mexican-American studies program at the University of Houston in 1972. Leonel Castillo was teaching a course, I was teaching a course called "El Barrio" and David Lopez was teaching a course, it was part-time. I was there from 1972 to 1976. I had completed my masters in 1973 and was also attending the University of Houston. Now, in 1973, when I left Austin High School, I was also a member of the board of directors for AAMA – Association for the Advancement of Mexican-Americans. From 1972 to 1973, AAMA had pretty much ceased to exist as an active organization but existed in name only. Yolanda had approached me and asked if maybe we could reactivate the organization to go after model cities for some monies.

EV: Which Yolanda was that?

LRC: Yolanda Black. So, we talked about that and she asked me if I would consider helping with that and I said, "Well, yes, but what I would like to do is just start from scratch, set up a brand new organization," and she said, "Well, we still have the paperwork from AAMA, maybe we can use that paperwork." At that point in 1973, in the spring of 1973, AAMA was a defunct organization and we said, well, O.K., we can resurrect it and use the old paperwork and write to the Secretary of State and reactivate all that paperwork, which we did. We had to basically take the paperwork and write to the Secretary of State and reactivate everything so we could use the name and the nonprofit. And we had to write to IRS. And so, we approached model cities and they were going to give us a grant for $35,000 for an art center. I told Yolanda Black, I said, "Look, I can work on this project but I am really not interested in an art center. One of the dreams that I have is to start a prototype school for at risk kids, drop-outs, potential drop-outs, because we really need that in Houston. It would be something really" . . . back then, we used the term "revolutionary, and it would be a model for other Barrio organizations to follow." So, she said, "Well, if you work with it, we'll support you on that." So, we got the grant from model cities and I left my job in HISD and devoted full-time to setting up George I. Sanchez School in the spring and summer of 1973. We were debating whether we would be able to actually start classes in the fall and we said, well, let's try it. So, we did. We had an old warehouse at 3518 Polk, which did not belong to us, and we were renting space there. The space was not donated to us. We actually had to pay rent. I went out to Schlumberger and they donated these oil spools. I asked them if we could have these oil spools, these cable spools, so we had these big tables and we brought about 4 of them in to the warehouse and we used those as desks. There was no

plumbing, no heating in that building. So, I went out to this auto supply place and I bought one of these kerosene and oil heaters, the kind they use in auto garages. And you mix kerosene and oil in there and you light it. It is made out of tin and it's got a little 4 foot smoke stack. I got a couple of those and we put them inside this big room in the warehouse. Then, we had the cable spools sitting in there and the kids would sit around the cable spools. We had two teachers. And we would heat that thing in the morning and that is how we heated that big open space in that warehouse. Keep in mind we didn't have any money. We only had a $35,000 budget for the whole year and we had to use that mostly to pay the teachers. We started working on the plumbing and we had 2 teachers: Joe Rodriguez, who is now a very successful administrator in California and also very good artist in his own right; Mary Zuniga was the other teacher. She was from the Valley. She was teaching English and Joe was teaching art. The rest of us were teaching history. And that is how we started, with a very, very small budget.

Then, about the same time, I had become involved with a group called the Chicano Communications Council. That was in 1974. We had gone to KPRC television to talk to Jack McGruger because we wanted to hire more Hispanics, more Mexican-Americans, more Chicanos there at Channel 2 and to do more programming. And we were expecting him to just butt heads with us. He said, "No, I agree with you. You are right. We do need to hire more Mexican-Americans and you are right, we do need to do more for the Mexican-American community." I was thinking, gee, he is not supposed to say that! But he was very open and receptive. In fact, I think he was almost glad we were there. He turned out to be a very, very gracious man who started talking about his son-in-law who was Mexican-American and a professor at a university in New Mexico. His

son-in-law's mother had been a very prominent archaeologist in northern Mexico and she also was Mexican and so we got a really warm reception from Jack McGrue, station manager at Channel 2. He found out that we were doing this project out in the Barrio for the kids, for the drop-outs and so he came out to visit and he said, "Do you know what? I am going to get the guys there at the station to build a radio setup for your school so your kids can practice radio broadcasting here from the school." I said, "Wow that was nice." Well, now we had assets, real assets. We didn't have just the cable spools and this oil kerosene heater. Now we had real assets. We had this radio setup.

EV: Now you could broadcast at school?

LRC: Yes. And so, they came in, these engineers from KPRC, put in this radio setup. It was like a real radio station with the meters and the sound meters and all that. By this time, we had increased our grant and had some other people working there including my brother, Phillip Cano, including Roberto Gutierrez who later went on to become a prosecutor with Harris County, and Rudy Garcia who is working as a software consultant in San Antonio now. I told them, I said, "Look, now we have assets but this building is so easy to break into. I mean, on that loft on the second floor, the windows are all busted and somebody could come in here and we don't have a whole lot of security – somebody might come in." So, we set up what was called the shotgun squad. So, I went down to Montgomery Wards and I bought this pump action shotgun. It wasn't anything fancy. I brought it back and I told the guys, I said, "O.K., we are going to take turns sleeping here at night to protect the place." Of course, we were all very young. I was in my early twenties. We were all in our early twenties.

EV: Pretty stupid!

LRC: Yes.

EV: Sleeping at night with a shotgun?

LRC: We were dedicated.

EV: Dedicated?

LRC: Dedicated is the word. And so, we took turns sleeping there at night with a shotgun. There were two attempted break-ins actually. This lasted for about six months. We had what was called a shotgun schedule because we had started to acquire other assets and we just didn't want to get robbed. It was a really high crime area. So anyway, that lasted for about six months until we were able to raise enough money to fix the windows, fix the building, fix the doors, fix the locks, and then we went ahead and did away with the shotgun squad. We thought it was pretty interesting. Everybody agreed – we'd take turns sleeping there at night and in the morning, we'd come in at six and the guy who had taken his turn would go home, take a shower and come back. But that is what we did very early on.

We continued to go after other grants. We started to become more sophisticated about federal funds, state funds and that sort of thing and we started going after grants and started to grow and we hired more teachers. Joe Reyes started putting together the Chicano art gallery there and was very successful in getting some Chicano art shows there, traveling art shows. We were impressed. He got the kids involved in art. Of course, we were also teaching Mexican American history and literature. We had programs there for the kids. What helped me was that in 1970, I had approached my principal at Austin High School and asked him if I could teach Mexican-American studies at Austin High School and he said yes. I was surprised. So, I was teaching Mexican-American studies at

Austin High School from 1970 to 1973 until the time that I left. My classes were full. I didn't have any textbooks so I had to type the night before. I would read these books on Texas history, Southwest history, Mexican history, American history, and then I would type my notes on this typewriter on this mimeograph carbon paper. And then, I would come in to the school early in the morning and I would run them off and I would give this to the kids and that would form the foundation for my lectures and my classes with the kids. And we talked about everything going back to Mexican-American history, MAYO, the history of Arizona, the gold mine, the contributions of the Mexicans in Colorado, Texas, California. We talked to kids about the myth of Texas history and taught them the motivation behind the so-called Texas Revolution was slavery. And even though they talked about freedom and liberty, it was freedom and liberty for these white guys who were coming from Alabama and Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, Georgia, but when the Alamo was fought in 1836, the blacks in Texas were free. After the battle of San Jacinto and the defeat of Santa Ana and the New Texas Republic came into existence, the blacks were no longer free and blacks could not be in Texas unless they had the permission of the Texas Congress. And so, now Texas had slavery. So, it was freedom and liberty for one group but it was bondage for a group who had already been freed by the Mexican government. So, I was teaching the kids about the contradictions of Texas history. We had formed a teatro group there at Austin High School – Teatro Chicano Sexto Sol -- and we were doing plays about employment and the history and the culture and the kids in the Mexican-American studies program got involved with that. We took the name Sexto Sol from the Náhuatl tongue, the Aztec tongue because they believed in different ages, and Sexto Sol was the coming age when there would be harmony and

tranquility. And so, we took the name from Mexican-American history and literature. And the kids performed plays at the school. When a black American talent show was performed, we were there. So, we actually performed at the school. The kids were going to perform at a Catholic church in South Houston but the priest said, "No, we're not going to allow you to come in and perform because you may offend some of the Anglo parishioners." So then, the Paso group in South Houston boycotted and picketed the church because they would not allow this Chicano group to come in and perform plays, these high school kids. At that time, the schools in Houston were still being boycotted and this is something that had been started by the Mexican-American Education Agency, and they had rallies at Moody Park. So, we would perform at Moody Park for the rallies. The principal at the school became somewhat offended. One day, I was out, I was not there, so he called all the kids that were members of the Teatro Chicano Sexto Sol and he escorted them outside to the back of the building. He would not talk to them outside his office. And he basically told them, "You are going to have to disband. You can no longer have this group because you cannot do these plays."

EV: Was this the principal at Austin?

LC: Yes.

EV: He was giving you leeway to teach . . .

LC: Mexican-American studies.

EV: Did he think you had gone too far with the plays or something? With the drama group?

LC: Yes. And the kids told him no. They stood their ground and said no. They asked him, "Why do you wait until Mr. Cano is not here to tell us that we have to disband.

Why don't you tell him?" And so, when I got back, the kids were telling me what was going on. They said, "No, the principal came to us and took us out in the back of the building and said we had to disband – we could no longer have this theater group." And I said, "Well, how do you guys feel?" And they said, "No, we want to continue." Because the plays were about employment discrimination, they were about the rape of the culture, they were about the history, they were about education. So, we continued to do the plays. We did one play which was called . . . I can't recall the name but it was a political satire and at that time, there was a mayoral election, city council election, and so we did a play about politicians. There was a fictitious character running for mayor. This was in a fictitious city called Dome City. And there was this man running for mayor and we would show him going out into the barrios talking to the people and there was one part in the play where he would say, "Amigos, mis amigos, tacos, tamales, enchiladas." It was really poor Spanish and, of course, everybody is cracking up. It was funny. It was a parody on politics in the barrio and how the politicians would go into the barrio and make all these promises and, of course, never adhere to them and never make any appointments. Well, some people felt that one of the characters in our play resembled one of the candidates too closely who happened to be mayor. And then called somebody down at the school board and then somebody down at the bank.

EV: He was vertically challenged?

LC: Well, the character in our play was called Midget Belch. It was a fictitious name. It was not intended to offend anybody, O.K., it was nothing personal. It was simply for comic relief – the same kind of stuff you see on Saturday Night Live only we were doing it back in 1971, 1972. But it was funny. People were laughing. And they got the point.

They saw how politicians would go into the barrios and patronize the people. And so, some people were offended and they called the principal and said, hey, this guy has got to stop these plays, something has to be done, he has to be fired or something has to happen.

EV: That was the people from the city?

LC: Well, somebody from the city called the school administration, then somebody from the school administration supposedly got to the school board and superintendent. And then, they called the principal.

EV: Is that when David Lucas was on the school board then?

LC: This was 1972. So, I was called in to the principal's office. Of course, I was a very young teacher. The principal said, "You are going to have to stop doing these plays because you used the mayor's name in an inflammatory and derogatory manner." And I said, "Well, sir, we did not use the mayor's name. We had a fictitious character in our play." I told him what the fictitious character's name was. And then, I told him, I said, "Look, if the mayor chooses to identify with one of our characters that is his problem, not ours because everybody in our play was fictitious. It was a satire. It was a parody. And it was basically to parody the game of politics and it was a teaching lesson for the kids and they learned from it. It generates discussion, just like our play on education and our play on culture." And he said, "Well, you are violating the Hatch Act." I said, "Excuse me?" He said, "You are in violation of the Hatch Act," and I said, "Well, sir, if I am not mistaken, I believe the Hatch Act has something to do with federal employees, government employees conducting partisan politics on federal time but I don't think anyone has been accused of violating the Hatch Act since the days of Joe McCarthy. And we haven't violated the Hatch Act." Then he went on to suggest that perhaps I

should be fired, and I said, "Well, sir, if you want to fire me, go ahead but I can guarantee you, you have no grounds and I will protest that vigorously, but you have no grounds to fire me." And, of course, he was very nervous. His hands were shaking. So, that was the end of that. We kept doing the plays and they didn't fire me but when I left in January of 1973 to go full-time to setting up the George R. Sanchez School, I am sure that he was glad to see me leave. But the kids were very dedicated. They did a wonderful job doing the plays. They enjoyed it. Of course, we were also teaching Mexican-American studies and that was the first time it had been done. We finally got books because the vice-principal had come in to do a walk-through observation of my class. I happened to mention, "Gee kids, I apologize that we don't have any books but here are your handouts." And after that, he talked to me and he said, "Mr. Cano, you don't have any books?" I said, "No, sir, but I have mentioned it many times before." I finally got books. But I left in January of 1973 to start working full-time on the George R. Sanchez School with AAMA. And, of course, that took us into the summer and we started the classes that fall. It was a struggle but we had some very dedicated people there. The people that were coming in to work with that program all had a sense of mission and that is one of the things that really impressed me about the people from that time, is that they had a sense of mission. They weren't doing it for salary because we weren't getting paid very much. But they were doing it strictly from a sense of mission.

During this period of time, the Chicano movement, as we called it -- some people called it the Chicano revolution, social revolution -- was in full swing here in Houston. In the first part of June of 1970, barrio MAYO had led an anti-war protest in Magnolia. We had started at what we called Hidalgo Park or Mexican Park and we marched through

the barrios protesting the Vietnam War. And one of the people leading that march was Gregorio Salazar who was the head of barrio MAYO and Yolanda Birdwell and we were marching through the streets, through the barrios protesting the war. I had gone up to Gregory and I said, "Gregory, do we have a permit to march?" And he said, "Hell no, we don't need no permit!"

EV: We don't need no stinkin' permit!

LC: I said, "Well, O.K." And we marched. So, I came to live here that summer and started teaching. Actually, I started teaching at Milby High School. But then, this was the time when we were doing the paired schools, where they had paired, I believe it was twenty two black elementaries and twenty two primarily Mexican-American schools and they called it segregated because Mexicans were technically white. That was on May 25, 1970, the United States Fifth Circuit of Appeals made that ruling about the paired schools being OK. Of course, that led to this big boycott. And so, there was a lot of rezoning as well to try to integrate the schools with the technically white Mexican-American kids and black kids and the Anglo kids were left totally out of the picture. And so, that caused an uproar in the community. One of the leaders in that, of course, was Leonel Castillo and John Castillo and some other folks. They had these boycott schools and so in that period of time, it was a very turbulent time. And so, at Milby High School, the principal said, "We are going to be rezoned." So, a lot of the kids that had been attending Milby would be rezoned to Austin High School. And so, the principal basically was looking for volunteers of people who might want to transfer out. I went and talked to him and said, "I would like to transfer out if you can transfer me to Austin High School." He was a very nice man. I believe his name was Roscoe Bayliss – a very, very sincere man. And he

said, "Well, Mr. Cano, I'm going to try to get you transferred over to Austin High School but if I send you over there, you know, I don't want people saying that you were over there doing this Chicano power thing," and he made a fist like this. These blacks had this black power thing and they had this fist. "I don't want you going over there and I don't want people saying that we sent a teacher over there who is doing this Chicano power thing over there." I said, "Well, sir, I understand. I am going over there to teach English. I am an English major, and social studies." So, he helped me get transferred to Austin High School.

Anyway, going back to the summer of 1973, we got the school opened, we continued to get other federal grants, and people would come by to see us. We also got a grant from what was called the Emergency School Aid Act back then, but it had to be channeled through the school district. So, in 1974, I was visited by one of the area superintendents, one of the assistant superintendents for HISD, and he said, "We want to make you part of HISD. We want the AAMA School to be part of HISD," and I wondered why do they want us to be part of HISD? Well, we were being very critical of the school district, we were being very critical of the dropout rate, so we kept talking about the dropout rate in HISD. We kept saying, "Look, the dropout rate is 50% and there is no dropout program in HISD." So I was not aware that we were being that much of an embarrassment to them but we did get some publicity. And so, they sent an assistant superintendent down there to say, "We want to make you part of HISD." And I met with my people. By this time, I had a former student who was my student at Austin High School was now working for us. She had since gone to the University of Texas and graduated with a degree in math – Patsy Rubio. She was working for us. Phillip Cano

was working for us and basically, I met with the group and said, "What do you guys want to do? Do y'all want to become part of HISD? You get benefits, insurance, vacations, paid holidays, I mean, everything, or do you want to stay here and just struggle and continue doing what we are doing try to raise awareness of the issues and the problems and the dropout rate." Everybody said, "No, we want to keep doing what we are doing." So, they voted not to accept all the security and the benefits and they voted to continue to do what we were doing, which was to raise social awareness about the dropout rate and the problems in the barrio and the problems with the school district, etc. So then, about four months later, another assistant superintendent came to see us and he said, "We want to make you part of HISD. We want to call you AAMA Prep, and we are going to give you this and we are going to give you this and we are going to get you your own building and we're going to do this and this." I said, "Wow, it sounds great." He says, "Yes, and we are going to call you AAMA Prep." And again, I met with our folks and they said, "No, we want to continue to do what we are doing. We want to be independent. We want to be free to speak out about the issues. We want to be free to criticize the public education system and we want to be here because our reason for existing is that there are too many dropouts." So, we continued to operate like that.

Now, that was in 1974. Ironically, twenty years later in 1994, I ran into one of those assistant superintendents who was no longer with the school district but was a consultant with some private schools and he came up to me and said, "Luis, how are you doing?" "Hey, how's it going?" And we talked. Out of nowhere he says, "Do you remember when I came to see you way back in 1974?" I said, "Yes, I remember. You were going to make us part of HISD and you said you were going to change our name to

AAMA Prep." He said, "Yes, do you know why I really came?" I said, "Well, I guess not. Why?" He said, "I was actually sent, actually two of us were sent to close you down. Our purpose was to shut you down because you were embarrassing the school district with this dropout issue and so we needed to some way of quietly shutting you guys down. By making you part of the school district, then we could control you and quiet all of the criticism but you wouldn't listen. Y'all insisted on remaining independent even though we were offering benefits and security, etc., and you wouldn't do it." I said, "Well, I'll be darned. I am glad you told me that. I was always curious why y'all had come by." And it is twenty years later and he is saying this. Basically, he said, "Well, I'm glad you guys didn't do it." I thought that was really . . . I don't know, it sort of validated what we were doing.

EV: Exactly. Well, let me ask you something, Dr. Cano. Let me go back a little bit to your initial Model Cities $35,000 . . .

LC: That was the initial grant.

EV: And you said that was mainly for salaries?

LC: Right.

EV: And you had the two teachers and I assume yourself?

LC: And myself.

EV: And you were divvying up that $35,000?

LC: Correct.

EV: As salary?

LC: Correct.

EV: And that was per year?

LC: Well, that was the first year and actually, at the end of that first year, they closed us down.

EV: I assume you were working for more than ten grand each?

LC: Right. It was very little. We were getting a lot of donations in terms of equipment and books and things like that.

EV: That was the cash that y'all lived off of?

LC: Correct. They actually closed us down in 1974.

EV: They being?

LC: Model Cities. Palmer Bowzer who was the head of Model Cities said, "Well, we're not going to fund that program anymore." And so, then I told the kids, I said, "They want to shut us down." The kids said, "No, they can't do that. What are we going to do?" I said, "Well, we have to go down to City Hall and we have to talk before City Council and we have to protest." So, we talked to Hicks Flaga and Gloria Bonilla at Ripley House to arrange to get buses. They had school buses. And on the day that City Council was going to meet to vote on this, we had all the senior citizens from Ripley House fill up the buses, we had our students fill up the buses, parents, and us and we went down to City Hall. We got on the agenda to speak. Two of our kids were going to speak: Jenny Velasquez and another boy named Danny. I cannot remember Danny's last name. They were students there at the school. And in order to make the greatest impact, I said, gee, we need to get some publicity on this, so I called Channel 11, Channel 2, Channel 13, Channel 20, and I said, "Hey, there's going to be a big riot down at City Hall today because they are closing down this barrio school, this alternative education center, and there are busloads of people from the barrio going down there." Of course, I didn't

tell them that 60% of them were senior citizens. So, they all showed up en masse. They were there and our kids went up and spoke and we had the auditorium full of these senior citizens. At that time, Fred Hofheinz was mayor. So, I had also gone up to speak. And so, Mr. Hofheinz looks over at Palmer Bowzer and he says, "Mr. Bowzer, I am directing you to keep this program open and increase the funding for this program." Of course, everybody cheered and all the kids . . . yay, and everybody was applauding. Of course, Palmer Bowzer was already mad at us because we had vilified him but anyway, we kept the school open, the kids were really proud of themselves. They had actually gone before city government and actually spoken up and worked through the system and protested. And, of course, it was a moving moment, too, because you had all these young kids and then you had all these very old people, these senior citizens there as well. And they were all from the Second Ward. And we had filled up the auditorium. Of course, we had the news media there. Then, the news media came over to the school to interview us and they said, "Well, who are you people and why are you here and why are you doing this, what is your reason for existing?" So, we started to get this publicity and recognition. So, it really helped us. It kind of put us on the map. We told them why we were there, what we were doing, why we were doing it. It was to draw attention to the dropout rate, the education deficiencies, etc.

EV: Do you remember Greg Dumas? Was he with Channel 13?

LC: Greg Dumas was with Channel 13 at the time, yes.

EV: Did he cover your thing?

LC: Yes, he did a story on us. I can't recall who all the reporters were but I know that Greg Dumas was with 13. Very supportive.

EV: Yes. Now, I want to go back to the Chicano studies program as it developed at U of H. Was there any model that was used for that? Didn't San Diego or one of the California colleges already launch a Chicano study program? And if so, did you use that as a model?

LC: Oh, U of H came along pretty late as far as setting up a Chicano Studies Program because they had one, I believe, at Santa Barbara, San Diego State, other places in California and I am not sure about Texas. I believe they were trying to use those as models but basically, it was very small. They were teaching three courses. It was being done on a part-time basis.

EV: I guess what I am trying to say is what did you and Leonel and David do to give that thing structure or form or mass?

LC: What I did is I took some of the structure that I used in my Mexican-American studies program at Austin High School from 1970, so I had an advantage in that I had already structured a Mexican-American studies program. I had written a curriculum for a Mexican-American studies program. In fact, it was a very good curriculum. I had taken it to the director of social studies for HISD - Houston Independent School District. I met with the director of social studies for HISD in 1971 and I said, "Well, I have this curriculum." I gave it to her, she read it and she told me, "Mr. Cano, we cannot publish your curriculum guide." I said, "Well, why not?" And she told me, she says, "Because what you are teaching, what you are proposing in your curriculum is you are promoting socialism and I belong to a group that has been fighting Communism in this country for a very long time." And I said, "Oh my goodness!" Well, I was a young teacher in my early twenties, I had been in Houston since the summer of 1970, and I was talking to the

director of social studies and I was being told that what I was teaching was promoting socialism. And I said, "Well, I don't believe I am," and I told her, I said, "Look, I'm an old boy scout, I'm an Eagle scout. I don't believe I am promoting communism. I am basically trying to enfranchise the kids, make them aware of their history and contributions of Mexican-Americans and Tejanos." I asked her, I said, "Look, what is it in here that you feel and makes you think that I am promoting socialism and communism?" And she said, "Well, in your curriculum, you suggest and you teach about Cesar Chavez, and Mr. Cano, you know," as I would embrace this belief . . . "You know that Cesar Chavez is a socialist." And I said, wow. I was thinking to myself wow, this is too much. I said, "Well, ma'am, I don't know that Cesar Chavez is a socialist or a Democrat or Republican. I don't know and that is not the point of the lesson. I do know that he is a significant figure within the Mexican-American community. He does work with farm workers and he is involved politically and socially. And so, he is a known figure. And so, we study him as part of the social process. If you look under selected readings, one of the recommended readings is Little Cesar by Ralph Toledano and it is a very anti-Chavez, very anti-socialist type book." And she said, "Oh, well, that's good." But they still wouldn't publish it so I had to go to the outside and we got it published through the Hispanic International University and the Association for the Advancement of Mexican-Americans. But because of the tone and the temperament within the Houston Independent School District at that time, they would not touch anything like this. I mean, today it would be embraced and say, 'Wow, this is great. Let's do it.' Back then, even the mention of Cesar Chavez in the Mexican-American studies curriculum sent up red flags. So, you have to use that as an indicator of what the tone of the period was.

EV: Yes, they throw the name of Karl Marx around all the time now as if he was just another economist.

LC: That is like St. Thomas Aquinas. Well, what I didn't know, when I came to Houston in 1970, was that the previous year the Chicano kids actually walked out of school. In fact one of them, Bernard Garcia, was one of the leaders. They had walked out of Davis High School and they did walk out just like they did in Del Rio and California. They had a Chicano High School student walkout in Houston. They were protesting in front of the high school. And so, there were some turbulent times when young Chicanos were asking for equity and equality and an opportunity to study the history. And I think that was one of the reasons that I was able to get my Mexican-American Studies History course at Austin High School without a whole lot of fuss because they had just had that walk out that previous spring.

EV: U of H was not very helpful to Mexican-American interests back then. As you recall, we had to fight for a lot of things back then. How did you get them? How did the 3 of you get them to embrace a Chicano studies program? What were the politics behind that or pressure points or who did you talk to?

LC: I was not privy to a lot of those things primarily because I was teaching full-time at Austin High School and doing some other projects. I don't know if Leonel or David were involved. I know that we were there part-time in the evenings and then part-time in the summers.

EV: Was any one else mixed up with them?

LC: It was Dr. Guadalupe Quintanilla and Tatcho Mindiola. I don't believe that they saw eye-to-eye on how the program should move forward. And so, there were some

debates as to how it should move forward. As far as the discussions on how the program should proceed, again, I was not privy to a lot of those discussions although I am going to say there was some debate among the Mexican-American supporters of the Mexican-American studies program back then that we probably could have done without but I was not privy to . . . I know there was resistance on the part of the University of Houston. They were very slow to change. They were very slow to bring in Mexican-American studies there was pressure that had to be applied and there was social pressure applied at the University of Houston from the outside by different groups – Barrio MAYO being one of them, but it was like that with all institutions in Houston. That was the case with the radio stations, TV stations, universities, the public schools. There was pressure being applied with all types of institutions back then and the University of Houston was one of them.

EV: **This is the end of Side A of tape 1**. We are going to flip it over.

This is the beginning of Side B, Tape 1

LC:. But I am not privy to those details. I don't know and didn't spend a lot of time at U of H back in those early days.

EV: Just looking from where you began to the organization that worked through AAMA and all that, who was the person who inspired you the most or gave you the biggest idea? Was it just an epiphany that you had, a light from heaven that told you to go release your people from the Egyptians?

LC: A burning bush! A burning nopal. I had been involved with a Chicano group at the University of North Texas and we actually had organized a group at North Texas. When I was at Texas A&I in Kingsville, we organized a group. In fact, MAYO had been

organizing down in Kingsville and back home in Corpus Christi, my neighbors were involved in the Farm Worker march and my neighbor was talking to me about when the farm workers marched through Nueces County and they went to the march, so I was aware of a lot of these things. I recall being in my Shakespeare class and Dr. Ford was my professor and he was making a point in Hamlet and he said . . . and I was the only Mexican in that class . . .

EV: I'll bet!

LC: He said, "At this point in Hamlet's soliloquy, he was very emphatic – sort of like somebody yelling "Remember the Alamo." I said, "O.K., that's cool, he's making a point. I don't have a problem." Until he looks at me and he says, "Oh, excuse me, Mr. Cano. I didn't mean to bring up something that was so sensitive to you." And I wondered, why is this guy saying this? I didn't say anything. And so, I said, well, here is this Shakespeare professor putting me on a spot in front of all these white students. I feel I have no choice but to rebuttal and I said . . . of course, I am depending on this guy for my grade. I said, "That's O.K., Dr. Ford, it doesn't bother me because if you recall, we beat you at that battle. We won that battle." And he turned red and he was embarrassed because here not only was a student putting him in his place and shutting him up but it was a Mexican student. And there was this young black student female sitting in front of me and she and I were always talking – we were very good friends – and she turned around and she said, "Oh, you're dead meat." She says, "You're going to flunk this course!" I told him, "You had better not flunk me because I know I am the best damned writer in here." No, but I had to work extra hard in there and she said, "Your papers are going to have to be twice as good as everybody because this man is looking for a reason

to flunk you." And he was after me. And what made it worse is that this student, undergraduate student that he fancied actually would come to the class and pick me up and walk me to my next class.

EV: That he fancied?

LC: That he fancied, yes. I was nineteen, twenty at the time. It was funny. Well, it wasn't funny at the time but it is funny now. So, I had the exposure, as you said. I had the exposure. I apologize about getting off on that tangent.

EV: I don't want you to think you can't do that - go off on the tangent because that is how a lot of the meat of a person's character, personality comes from those tangents. We don't know it at the time but they are listing their influences. So, you didn't have any kind of a situation where you emerge as a militant? You kind of started out that way, is that pretty much it?

LC: Well, I think it was more of an evolution. When I was a little boy, I would go to my mother and I would ask her, "Ma, what kind of American am I because Billy told me that he was an Anglo American and I don't look like Billy, so what kind of American am I?" My mother would say, trying to protect me, she would say, "We are all Americans. We are all the same. We are all Americans." I said, "Ma, we're not all the same." I said, "I look different from him." And she said, "Well, you are Latin American." I said, "O.K." So, I was curious.

When I was in junior high school, I used to love to go to the library. God, I loved the library, and I spent a lot of time there. I had gone to the Texas Room one time and I saw these books called Our Catholic Heritage in Texas by Carlos Castaneda and I started reading those books. I said, "Wow," I never learned this stuff in Texas history. I never

learned this stuff in American history. It was talking about Pineda and it was talking about Escondon and Sanchez and all these people who had colonized Texas. And they had hospital districts, they had speeding laws in San Antonio and they had these mission schools and they were educating and they were setting up roads, municipal laws, city councils and city governments before the pilgrims ever came. I was fascinated and I said, man, I never learned this stuff in school.

There was this other book called The Latin Americans of South Texas by William Matson who was a very renowned sociologist. I got that book and I started reading it and there was a picture in there of these Mexican-American women working in a cannery factory in Harlingen and it says, "Latin Americans are quick with their eyes and swift with their hands and make good cannery workers," something along those lines. And I said, man, that's not true. If I was there, I'd probably bleed to death or something because I don't think I would be able to do that kind of work, and this guy says that Latin Americans . . . I don't know, he's talking like we're designed to do this work. And this was a sociologist who was supposedly very supportive of Mexican American culture. So, I was reading this book by William Matson and had very stereotypic images of Mexican Americans in Texas. So, I became embarrassed and ashamed, I said, "Man, this is not true. This is not me. I'm not like this." And so, somebody walked into the Texas Room there in the library. I would get one of Castaneda's books and I'd cover it because I did not want to be seen reading this terrible stereotypic book about Latin Americans, and it bothered me. It bothered me. I wanted to read what Carlos Castaneda had to say. And keep in mind, I was in junior high school, I was in the seventh grade. I was studying Texas history. My Texas history teacher was Mr. Nickerson. He was a nice man but he

had been taught the traditional way. And he actually took us on a field trip to go look at the movie, "The Alamo." When I was sitting in Texas history class . . .

EV: The one in Bracketville?

LC: Yes. I wanted to crawl under my desk. You know, I said, man, they're making us look like bad guys. I mean, I know we've done something good, we've done good things. Why do they make us look like the bad guys? Something is not right here. And I sensed at my very, very young age, I said, something is not right here. I didn't realize at the time that it is what we would later call "the rape of our culture," where our culture and our history was being taken from us. And, you know, all these kids watching this movie. Was it John Wayne . . .

EV: John Wayne and Richard Widmark, Richard Boone.

LC: Yes, the Alamo and the drawing of the line in the sand. I'm sitting there hating every minute of it sitting in this movie thinking why do I have to be in here because it is so one-sided, and I knew it. I was a smart kid, O.K.? I was a little nerdy. I was watching this and I said, this is not right. This is not true. This thing is not telling the truth. This thing is not telling the truth. It is making it look like a fairy tale. We are being taught a fairy tale. And I would even tell some of the other Chicano kids, I said, "Man, this is a fairy tale. This is not true." And they said, "Oh, Cano, you don't know what you're talking about." I said, "I do know what I'm talking about. This is not true. It is like a fairy tale. It is embarrassing." And there were only just a handful of kids then who kind of saw the same thing, they said, 'No, something is not right. Something is not right." But that was my experience in seventh grade Texas history and I know it was the experience of tens of thousands of other Chicano kids all over the Southwest. It was a terrible

experience. It was demoralizing. It was embarrassing. It was humiliating. And here we were going to school being humiliated. It wasn't right. It was wrong.

EV: Did you have that little comic book from Mobil Oil . . .

LC: Yes, we did. "Me No Alamo. Me No Alamo." Yes, I remember that. Oh, that was nasty. I hated that.

EV: I understand I was looking up on the internet and some companies took all that stuff out of it. But yes, the Mexicans were greasers and all that stuff.

LC: Yes, "Hey, you greaser" and all that stuff. Yes, I recall that very vividly. But anyway, it was sort of an evolution and so when these things were happening around the Southwest with the walkouts, etc., I was ready. I mean, I was primed because I had a really good awareness of our history already because I had made it a point to kind of dig it out on my own.

EV: So, when I asked you the question, "Did you evolve _____ or were you just born this way, I was right!" You were born this way. All you needed was the right temperature and the right soil.

LC: Well actually, my mother had actually told me about my grandfather. My mother was a very quiet, very loving lady. I mean, she never said a cuss word. She never said anything bad about anybody. She was just one of these ladies who just was very kind to everybody – wanted to give everybody whatever she had. I mean, she was just a very nice lady. My father, on the other hand, he was a rough and tough old guy. But I asked my mother, I said, "I want to know about my grandfather. I never knew him. And I want to know about you and where you went to school," because I knew that she had gone to school in Del Rio back in the 1920s. I said, "Ma, how was it back then? Did you go to a

Mexican school?" She said, "Well, back then, in the 1920s, we didn't ask our parents a lot of questions. We stayed out of the way but I know that my father, in 1928, took me to enroll in the first grade in the San Felipe Independent School District in Del Rio and they told my father that they could not enroll me because I was a Mexican, that I had to be American, and he told them that I was born in Del Rio and I was an American." They said, "Well, she can't come to school here because she doesn't speak English." And so, my father told them, "Yes, she speaks English and Spanish. She's bilingual." And they told my father, "Well, no, she cannot come to school here. She has to go to the Mexican school." So, my mother's father, Juan Bautista Galaviz was a social activist in Del Rio and he said, "No, we're not going to play that game. We're not going to do it." He had gone through the Mexican Revolution he had been educated in Monterrey, Mexico, and he had come to Texas as a political refugee and he said, "No, we're not going to put you in the segregated school." So, he talked to his wife, Angela, and he said, "I'm going to set up a protest school." He had a rent house, he had become a businessman and he was very good friends with this priest named Father Robledo down in Del Rio. Robledo was one of these very idealistic priests. He would give everything to the poor. I mean, he would practice everything that was in the Bible. He would give his shoes to the poor. Sometimes he would even walk barefooted because he had given his shoes to the poor. So, the other priests weren't too crazy about him. They thought he was kind of going to the extreme with this poverty thing and giving to the poor. But he was very good friends with my grandfather, Juan B. Galaviz. And so, my mother's father, Juan B., talked to Father Robledo and then they talked to a couple of the monjitas and he said, "I want to open up a school, a protest school because I don't want to support the segregated school.

So, they got the rent house and they got the priest, Robledo, and they got the two nuns to be the teachers in this school. And they left it open to any kid in that barrio who wanted to go to that school. And so, they opened up shop. This was in 1928 in Del Rio, Texas. Well, at that time, the Ku Klux Klan in Texas had 30,000 registered members and they were registered. They had their own newspaper, Colonel Mayfield's News Sheet. It was a Ku Klux Klan newspaper. And they were persecuting Mexicans and Jews and Blacks in Texas. I mean, they were everywhere. So, the Ku Klux Klan would go to my grandfather's house, they would go to the school, they would threaten the priest because the priest and the nuns would actually stay there in the school -- Juan Galaviz gave them room and board there. During the day, the kids would come and take Spanish and math and reading and writing. My mother said, well, my father could not keep the school open because the "KOO-KOO-KOO" – that's what they called them, she said, "the KOO-KOO-KOO" would come in and threaten them and try to close the school down and they would tell my father that he needed to shut up and stay in his place and that he needed to send me to the Mexican school. And I told her, "Ma, don't you realize the significance of what your father was doing?" And she said, "Well, yes, he wanted me to be educated. He believed education was very important." I said, "Yes, he was doing more than that. He was taking a stand during a very dangerous time in Texas. I mean, he is lucky they didn't hang him." Well, the school ran for about one year but because of the constant harassment from the Klan, the priest ended up having to go to San Antonio and the school closed. But it operated for about one year. And my mother went to that school. But, at this time, there were other Mexicans in Del Rio who became very upset, very angry at the segregated school situation and it started to organize. Galaviz was just one of

them but there were others – the Gonzales family, Salvatierras – and they filed a lawsuit in 1930, Salvatierra v. San Felipe Independent School District which actually became the first court case filed against a public school which succeeded and which won but it was the first time Mexican-Americans had actually gone to court to fight school segregation anywhere in the United States. That was in 1930. It was Salvatierra v. Del Rio. But there were a lot of very politically savvy Mexicanos in Del Rio, Texas because so many of them were political refugees from the Mexican Revolution. The Salvatierras, the Gonzales', the Galaviz' and others, many others. They were very active with the Masons. There was a very active Masonic lodge there made up of men who had been born in Mexico and educated in Mexico, including Juan Galaviz.

EV: Wasn't there a lot of conflict between the Catholics and the Masons?

LC: Yes. Yes, there was. My grandfather was basically threatened by one of the leaders of the Catholic Church in Del Rio. They didn't come out and say it -- my mother said that they suggested – excommunication. That was tossed around. He became very upset. He said, "After all the donations I have made to the Jamaicas and they are talking to me like this.

EV: What were the Jamaicas?

LC: The fundraisers, the festivals.

EV: What did your father do? Was he a businessman?

LC: No, my father was an insulator. He was a construction worker. He did construction work for . . .

EV: Was he educated?

LC: He went to the third grade.

EV: And your mother, did she have a high school . . .

LC: My mother graduated from high school after finishing the eleventh grade because World War II broke out so basically, hey, if you finished the eleventh grade, you graduated, here is your high school degree, now go sign up. That was when World War II was breaking out and so she never went to the twelfth grade. She went to the eleventh. But she graduated - everybody graduated - and she became a civilian worker at the naval air station because there were no men. All the men were going off into the military. She went to college right after the war but didn't finish. She was married, had five kids. I remember that there were five of us and in the evenings after my father got home from construction work, she would go to school at night. I remember sitting on the front porch and she would be waiting for the bus and she would take the bus to the University of Corpus Christi and she would be taking night classes to try to finish her degree, and my father would support her in that which was . . . I didn't think about it back then but . . .

EV: That was rare.

LC: Yes. Here is this Mexican man who is supporting his wife getting on this bus and going by herself off to the University and he is babysitting these five kids. And, you know, we are eating beans and rice. And I remember, we had a lot of beans. They are good. I still eat them to this day! But yes, he would . . .

EV: Y'all had beans?

LC: Oh, yes. We had bean soup, we had refried beans, we had bean burritos, we had it all. But when she finished, when she finally graduated, my father put all five of us – this is 1954 . . . I was five, my brother was four, my sister was three, my other sister was two, my little brother was one . . . five, four, three, two, one . . . and they loaded all of us up in

the car and he took us to her graduation. I recall seeing a bunch of people in black gowns walking across the stage.

EV: I'll bet it was wonderful, man.

LC: I really didn't understand it all but yes, he took us to that.

EV: What did she major in?

LC: Education. She was a first grade teacher, elementary school teacher. But she had five kids and she was going to school at night. And then, he was supporting her so, yes, it was rare but true.

EV: O.K., let's fast forward a little bit and get to the . . . we touch a little bit on at one point, you challenged the FCC license of several of the media, electronic media here in Houston. Is that correct?

LC: Right.

EV: What set you up on that socialist activity?

LC: I got bored with the movie I was watching one night. No! Well, actually . . .

EV: I'm sorry to interrupt you but let's set the scene a little bit. We are talking about the early 1970s.

LC: Early 1970s, 1973.

EV: _____.

LC: 1973, 1974.

EV: As I recall, at that time in Houston, there is probably only one Hispanic that was on the set, Greg Dumas. Wasn't he the only one that was on?

LC: Greg Dumas whose real name was Guerrero but he had to change his name in order to make it. Back then, a lot of Mexican-Americans had to change their names in

order to make it in TV like Fortunato Cantu who had to change his name to Buddy Clark so he could do work here in Houston, Guerrero who had to change his name to Greg Dumas, Freddy Fender. I mean, it was common and they didn't have a choice. They loved that business but they had to change their name. And that was the mentality of the period.

EV: But of the TV channels anyway, Greg was the only one, wasn't he?

LC: Yes.

EV: Elma didn't come across _____.

LC: No, she was with the radio station. She was doing a radio show for some radio station – I can't recall the radio station, because I know she interviewed the kids from the Teatro Chicano one time. But she was with the radio station before she went to Channel 13. Yes, there was one guy at Channel 11 but he worked in the background. I can't recall his name. But no, there was nobody.

EV: O.K., so Greg was the only one, in essence?

LC: Right.

EV: And, as I recall, probably there was no real Mexican programming going on either. Was there a Mexican-American program . . .

LC: No.

EV: Even Argentino didn't have his show yet, did he, the empanada guy, _____ Martin?

LC: No. He was working at Channel 11, he was a reporter but there was nothing going on really. There was nobody being employed as directors, as producers, as anchors. I mean it was embarrassing.

EV: All right, so that was the scene.

LC: Right.

EV: So, where did you get on your charger and said, this isn't right?

LC: Well, I have always been a student of Texas history. I love Texas history, especially when it is the truth about Texas history – not the fantasy that we have been taught. Channel 11 was doing a three-part series on Texas history and it was the same stuff I had in the seventh grade. And I said, man, that's not right. So, we went and talked to the station and I said, "Why are you doing this thing on Texas history but you didn't say anything about the contribution of the Tejanos?" And they just wouldn't budge. So, there was a group in San Antonio at the time called the Bilingual Broadcasting Coalition led by a guy named Victor Soto, and they were petitioning and they were filing petitions to deny the license of radio stations and TV stations in San Antonio. And I started thinking, well, if these guys can be doing this, we should be doing it in Houston. And so, I got a Chicano attorney to volunteer to donate his time to write incorporation papers for us. I can't recall his name – I think it was Ernesto Valdes.

EV: A wonderful man. I've heard of him!

LC: And so, he wrote the incorporation paper for us. Bernard Garcia was a student at University of Houston at the time. He got very interested in this. And there are other stories to why . . . it is one of those tangents! But anyway, we decided O.K., we are going to do what Victor Soto and the BBC is doing in San Antonio. We are going to file petitions against these radio and TV stations and get them to hire more Mexicanos to do more programming. So, we went to Channel 11 . . .

EV: At that time, by law, the FCC had to petition every ear . . . why don't you go into that?

LC: Well, the regulation at the time was that the Federal Communications Commission required all TV and radio stations to keep what was called a public file, which was a file of all their employees, ethnic background, community programming, free community service commercials, and that sort of thing, and those public files were supposed to be open to the public because the airwaves belong to the public – they belong to us. And these investors may have permission to use the airwaves to make money and to broadcast, but they have to follow certain guidelines because it is public property. And they are also supposed to interview members of the public and put their interviews and their comments, their public comments, into this public file. And so, we arranged for us to be invited. We said, we want to make public comment - we want to be called in, because basically it had been a whitewash, a rubber stamp where they'd call somebody they knew in and they'd basically say, yes, everything is hunky-dory. And we started coming in and saying, well, no, it's not hunky-dory. And we started looking at the public files and we started challenging the number of Latino employees, the programming, etc., and we said, well, this has to change. And we met with Channel 13, Channel 11, Channel 2, Channel 20, Channel 26, KLOL, different radio stations, and we told them, "We want you to hire more Mexican-Americans, we want you to do more programming for the community. We want more on-air personalities who are Mexican-American. We want some changes made." And we did go to Channel 11 and we told them that we want you to do a Texas history documentary, a third Texas history documentary, which highlights the contributions of Tejanos. And they capitulated and they did and so I talked to . . . I

mean, I wanted to do it because I love history but I said, no, that would be a conflict. So, I called a guy that I knew in San Antonio, Richard Santos, who I had worked with before and I told him, "Look, we need somebody to be the Texas history expert for this documentary at Channel 11." So, they brought in Richard Santos and they did another documentary which was narrated by Bill Balleza and it was on the contributions of the Tejanos in Texas history. Then we told them we wanted them to hire a Mexican-American community relations director and they said no. And they hired an Anglo-Saxon lady. And so, we had Yolanda Navarro, the attorney, not Yolanda Navarro-Black from AAMA, who was interested in that position and we basically went to talk to Jim Richdale who was the station manager at Channel 11. We said, "We want you to hire Yolanda Navarro to be the community relations director," and he said, "We have already hired somebody." I said, "You hired a white person?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Yes, but we have been talking to you before and you said that if any positions opened up where a Mexican-American would have an opportunity to come in to your station, you would use that to increase your Mexican-American employment and you didn't do it." "Well, we found somebody that was qualified." "Well, she is qualified, too. She speaks really good English." So, we said, "Well, you know what, we are just going to have to petition to take away your license," and we did. We filed with the FCC a petition to deny license to Channel 11 and they backed off - they hired Yolanda Navarro to be the community relations director because they told us that they would use any positions that became open to hire a Mexican-American employee.

EV: Was John Davenport the director at that time? News director or something? Is he the one you met with?

LC: We met with Jim Richdale who was a station manager at Channel 11 and a couple of other folks. I don't recall the other people that were in the meeting.

EV: I recall that when we went to the meeting, that Bill Balleza was brought in . . .

LC: He was in the meeting.

EV: And John Davenport was there. As a matter of fact, I talked to John Davenport before and he remembered that meeting clearly.

LC: He did?

EV: Yes, he did. I met him. He looked at me and he said, "God, you look so familiar." I said, "I was at that meeting and it was the venerable Mr. William Navarro who was with us. It was the three of us. And so, they brought in Bill Balleza and he tried . . .

LC: I don't recall his position.

EV: I think they sent him out kind of as the scapegoat to take on the heat because he was very new, but anyway . . .

LC: They did hire Yolanda Navarro. And then, at Channel 13, we met with Ken Johnson and Jim Masushi. We looked at the public file and they agreed to hire folks. They hired a Mexican-American for the community relations position and they started a program called Mexican-American Dialog that Greg Dumas worked with at Channel 2. They started doing a simulcast in Spanish. When they were doing their 10 o'clock News, there would be a simulcast in Spanish on KLVL. And we got a gentleman who was teaching at TSU who was a Spanish teacher and I cannot recall his name – I think it was Hernandez – to do the simulcast at Channel 26. We filed petitions on Channel 26, Channel 20, some of the radio stations. Bernard Garcia was the other person that was with us. In fact, Bernard kept all those papers, all those documents. Bernard is an

attorney here in Houston for Harris County, a Harris County attorney, and he has become sort of a tax expert of sorts. But he kept all those documents. He has all those documents and all those papers. In fact, when he was in law school, he wrote a paper for one of his professors – Lucas Salinas – detailing the work of Chicano Communications Council. But we did file petitions before the FCC and according to Bernard, a lot of those filings are listed there in the Proceedings of the Federal Communications Commission.

We learned a lot from the United Church of Christ who was doing filing petitions, too.

EV: As I recall, didn't CBS send a guy from Chicago to come . . .

LC: It was Capital Cities Broadcasting Corporation sent a couple of guys from New York. The African-American gentleman was Andrew Jackson.

EV: He took us to dinner.

LC: He took us to dinner, yes, he did. He was kind of strange. They sent a guy named Murphy who was, I think, the chairman of the board. His name was Murphy. I cannot recall his first name. But they had a couple of guys come in from Capital Cities Broadcasting who came down to Houston to meet with us. Of course, Capital Cities was later bought by, I think, Walt Disney or something like that. But yes, we dealt with Capital Cities Broadcasting Corporation. That was owned by Belo or Bello in Dallas. We had some dealings with them. But basically, it was just the work – putting in the petitions, researching the public files, filing the petitions, and putting pressure on the stations to hire more Mexican-Americans and they began to do that. They brought in several people. They brought in Carlos Aguillar at Channel 13. Channel 2 ended up taking Bill Balleza from Channel 11. And they brought in some camera people. They

brought in some community relations people. They brought in Frank Agras at Channel 13. They brought in Sylvan Rodriguez at Channel 11. I think Sylvan may have been brought in to Channel 13, then he went to Channel 11. But they started bringing in people. And we were feeding them resumes of people we would know. They brought in . . . he's with the District Attorney's office now.

EV: You mentioned him just a while ago. Frank . . .

LC: Roberto Gutierrez.

EV: Is he still with the DA's office?

LC: Yes. In fact, we had met with Channel 13 – Ken Johnson and the news director there at Channel 13 and I can't think of his name right now. But we sent Roberto Gutierrez to interview at Channel 13 and the news director wouldn't hire him, he said, "No, I'm not going to hire him. He's not good enough." And he smoked a pipe. We were kind of upset about that. Well, as fate would have it, this is about the time that Fred Carrasco, this drug dealer, was breaking out of the prison in Huntsville and it became an international news story. Every news agency from all over the world was there, parked in front of the Administration Building at the TDC in Huntsville. They had Japanese reporters, German, Mexican, Norwegian, Italian – everybody was camped out because this guy was breaking out of the Huntsville prison, named Fred Carrasco who was really a mean dude. He was no good. He was a drug dealer. And some other guy named Cuevas. And they had taken hostages. And so, everybody was there. Channel 13, Channel 11, Channel 2. They were covering the story because it was going on for several days. The Texas Rangers were there. I mean, it was a big story. They were concerned about what was going to happen to these hostages. And Roberto Gutierrez had not been

hired by Channel 13 -- he had gone back to San Antonio to work for his TV station back there. But we had arranged for him to get a part-time job at Channel 2 and a part-time job at AAMA because we wanted to bring him to Houston. Well, his TV station in San Antonio was covering the story of Fred Carrasco breaking out of the TDC, the jail there in Huntsville. And so, who do they send to cover the story? They send Roberto Gutierrez from San Antonio. I think it was KTSA. And there is Roberto Gutierrez in Huntsville along with these other people including the news director from Channel 13 and all these other people. So, Fred Carrasco -- even though he is a drug dealer, he is a bad guy, he's a bandit – says he is going to give an interview, but he will only give an interview in Spanish, and he would only give an interview to a Mexican reporter who speaks Spanish. He refuses to give an interview in English. Well, all these reporters are standing around and there is Roberto Gutierrez from San Antonio, KTSA, who says, "Hey, yo hago interesta." So, all these reporters are there and boom, Roberto Gutierrez gets the scoop. You've got these guys from Spain and South America and this guy from San Antonio gets the scoop. He goes in to do the interview. And he interviews Fred Carrasco and, of course, he sends all that back to KTSA and then he is the one that comes out to meet with all these reporters to do this overview in Spanish and English about his interview, the only interview, with Fred Carrasco before Fred Carrasco is killed. And there is Harver, his name is Harver from Channel 13 – the news director. There is Mr. Harver from Channel 13, he goes up to Roberto and says, "I'm impressed. I want you to come to work for us. I want you to come to work for us" because he is there personally directing the coverage of the story. Walt Harver, that was his name. Walt Harver. And Roberto says, "Hey, I am sorry. I can't work for you at Channel 13 because I am already working at

Channel 2 and for Luis Cano at AAMA." And so, there is Harver, he lost his opportunity. He has already turned this guy down – turns out to be the guy who gets the scoop on Fred Carrasco at TDC! It is funny, these tangents, but I thought of that.

EV: Well, that is a great story. I mean, I never knew Roberto had gotten that . . . I never connected him to it. I just saw his image at the courthouse.

LC: In fact, he worked with us when we did the Tejano documentary, that documentary. We got the Kennedy Award for that. He worked on that with us. But yes, we did file petitions against these radio stations, TV stations and were very effective with us. And, of course, this 1973, 1974, 1976, and it was a different time. They were totally ignoring us.

EV: Were you getting any flack from some of the more conservative Mexican-American residents about challenging these licenses?

LC: Yes.

EV: Any more names you want to throw out on that?

LC: No, because I think they were good people who cared about the community and they cared about the image, but I think they missed the point that people respect power. They were being accommodationists.They wanted to accommodate the power establishment, the powers that be, and we didn't. We wanted to confront them. We wanted it to change tomorrow morning by 8 o'clock, not fifty years from now. And we felt that the way to make change was to bring about public pressure and pressure to bear and that is what we were doing and there were some people who were not very receptive to that. But I have talked to a lot of those people since then and they appreciate a lot of the work that was done by different folks.

EV: Well, don't you see . . . some of these people that may have been critical of what you were doing, not really enjoying the fruits of what was done back then, I mean, even though they resisted, they got great advantage from it because a lot of them got into higher positions or more influential places . . .

LC: That is true. That did happen.

EV: All this situation from the 1970s and the people who resisted those changes . . . one of the announcers on Channel 8, the McNeil Lerner report or whatever they call that now, the evening Channel 8 news or whatever it is, they have a guy in there . . . gosh, I can't think of his name right now . . . but he said, "People have to remember that someone built the well that they drink out of now. Someone built the fire that warms them today." And I am not real sure that this generation understands that at all or has any sense of the history. And I suspect a lot of it . . . there is going to be a question in here. My impression is that a lot of these young Mexican-American students are coming from the outside and therefore, they don't really know what was here before. They see a continuum, which is not a continuum. This is probably the second or third blooming, blossoming period that we have had since the 1960s and the 1970s. But they have such resistance to the militancy or activist or anything else. And that is what got them what they have today. And I think that is probably true of any movement or any revolution but I think had Houston been less metropolitan than it is, then these people would learn about this but I think a lot of what was done in the 1960s kind of got diluted in the growth. Do you agree, disagree?

LC: I agree with it but I think that is true with anything that happens historically.

EV: Yes, it is just part of the growing process.

LC: I believe there are those folks who take the risks and many times, end up paying the price: If it is something military, obviously with their life; if it is something social, obviously either economically or with moving up the so-called economic ladder, that sort of thing. I think people like Leonel Castillo who made a professional sacrifice by heading up the school boycott back in 1970 paid a price. I believe that David Lopez running for the school board representing a community that was in uproar and angry, I think that took a certain amount of risk. Yolanda Birdwell, the stands that she was taking. I mean, there were a lot of people taking a stand. Joe Rojo who is an attorney who took a stand and others, yes, some people pay the price, some people have the courage to move forward and make the change. Others stand on the sideline and are asked, "Do you know him?" and say, "No, I don't know him. I don't agree with what they are doing. I think we should work within the system. I believe there is a better way to do this. I believe there is a better way to make change," I think these are the people who tend to accommodate and who tend to promote the status quo but they are not going to bring change about. If those men and women in Del Rio, Texas back in 1928, 1930 had not taken a stand . . . if Galaviz had said, "O.K., I'll just put my daughter in the Mexican school. We'll stay in our place and we'll just work through the system to make change," well, nothing would have changed. But he took a stand. He set up a protest school. He drew attention to a problem. He created a social awareness. And then, Manuel Gonzalez and the Salvatierras who were involved with the lawsuit, these people had not been willing to get involved. They could have said, "No, we don't want any trouble. We are afraid of the Ku Klux Klan, the KOO-KOO-KOO is going to get us," but they took a stand and they knew the KOO-KOO-KOO was very dangerous. They knew they were lynching Mexicans, they

were lynching blacks, they were persecuting Jews. They knew that. That was the mentality of the period. But they took a stand. Other people refused to take a stand. They would not take a stand. And those people were there in the 1920s, they were there in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and I guess they are here today as well. They are the ones who want to accommodate the status quo and the system because they don't want to take a chance on losing something. They don't want to sacrifice an opportunity to move up professionally or economically. And they do benefit. They do benefit from the change.

End of Tape 1

Tape #2, Side A

EV: This is tape #2, side A, continuing with Dr. Cano. This is Ernesto Valdez, the interviewer. O.K., so we were talking about the first wave, so to speak of Chicano activists and what has been coming in on the wake of that particular thing. Now, was there anything from that period of time that you think could be discussed or that you would like to make known that you haven't already made known, that you think some future historians who are doing some research would need to know? I mean, you are an historian, an educator, so you kind of know what would be the neat little kernels of some knowledge should be, for the sake of posterity, should be there about the struggles that we had in the 1960s and 1970s.

LC: Well, I believe what makes it really interesting is that many of the people who were involved with making the social change in the 1960s and the 1970s are the children and the grandchildren of political refugees who came from Mexico. There is a linkage here leading back to the Mexican Revolution. When you look at a lot of the newspapers that were started in San Antonio and Del Rio and other places – Houston, for example –

Tecolote, Tribuna – a lot of the people who came from Mexico as political refugees, from 1910 to 1925 had children and grandchildren and it was the political refugees who were getting involved with making social change back in the 1920s. And it was their children who were involved with working for equality and parity in the 1930s and the 1940s, and then it was the grandchildren of these political refugees who were working for social change in the 1960s and the 1970s. My grandparents on my father's side, my grandparents on my mother's side, were political refugees from a civil war in Mexico.

EV: What part of Mexico were they from?

LC: My father's people were from Guanajuato. My mother's people were from Guajilla and Nueva Leon. And there is a direct connection there. There is a direct linkage. And I think this is part of a heritage that has been passed on from grandparents to parents and hopefully that heritage will continue but I think that is the first lesson for those who study the history. It is the grandchildren and the children of political refugees from the Mexican civil war who were involved directly with the social change in the Southwest United States during the 1960s and 1970s. Of course, I gave the example of Galaviz and Salvatierra and Gonzalez in Del Rio, Texas in the 1920s. They were political refugees. Then we look at the 1960s and the 1970s and we see the grandchildren of these refugees becoming involved in making some social change. And it was a national movement. It was not isolated. We were talking about Houston, Harris County. But this was a movement that was occurring at the same time in California, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Washington State and other areas as well. The same thing was going on. There were the school boycotts. There were the demands for Mexican-American studies. We want to know our history. We don't want to feel like crawling under the chair when

we study the history of the United States. We want to know the truth. We want to know the facts about Texas history. So, the second lesson to be learned here is that it was a national movement. And some people say, well, it's a spin-off of the black Civil Rights Movement. Well, no, because the fight for parity, for equality, for opportunity, has been constant as long as Mexicans have lived in the United States going back to the 1840s when we had the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and many Mexicans in the Southwest were disenfranchised, they had their land stolen, they had their culture suppressed with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. And moving forward with the development of the railroads in the United States in the 1880s, 1890s, 1900s, many of those workers were Mexicans who built the railroads including my two grandfathers. My grandfather on my father's side came here and worked on the railroads. He came as a political refugee but he went to work on the railroads. My other grandfather on my mother's side came here as a political refugee and went to work in the railroad roundhouse in Del Rio, Texas. He was a railroad mechanic. My father's mother, when my father was three years old, was working on the railroads at Aransas Pass, Texas and they were living in the box car, the railroad box car. They had one family on one end and another family on the other end. They were called casas volantes. While my grandfather was laying track, my grandmother was washing clothes to make extra money for the railroad workers and selling tacos from beans and nopalitos that she would cut along the route. And so, not only was this a national movement, not only were we political refugees but the third lesson is that the industrialization of the Southwest by the railroad was another magnet, is another linkage, is another common denominator for us as Mexican-Americans because so many of us worked on the railroads, so many of us worked in the mines in the 1840s.

But the railroads, that is a third lesson. The industrialization through railroads brought in many Mexican refugees. And we found these folks working on railroads, railroad-related jobs, during the late 1800s, early 1900s, where many families even lived on the boxcars like my grandparents. So, this is something that has to be put into perspective -- the movement of historical events, including world events, affects us as Mexican-Americans. And that is something to remember. It affects our lives. Just like the Second World War was the reason that my parents met – my mother working as a civilian worker at the naval air station, my father being released from the military at the naval air station. They met there as a result of the Second World War. So, there are linkages to all of this. This is where I think we put things into a historical perspective; where we come in and we see the injustice, we see the discrimination, we see the omission in the history, we see that the United States is no different than the Soviet Union or China in teaching its history. It is an official history that portrays the dominant group as the good guys, the knights on the white horses, and the minorities as the bad guys. And so, we don't like that fantasy being taught. We say, hey, we've got the knights on the horses, too, and we've got the good guys, too, and we've made contributions. And I would ask myself when I was a kid in junior high school, did my people ever write anything? How come I never study Chicano writers, Latin writers? And I later realized that yes, we have written many, many things. We are illiterate people except that culture has been kept from us – our culture, our history, has been taken from us. Our culture has been raped. Just the way I was feeling when I was sitting in that Texas history movie when I was in the seventh grade – that is the rape of the culture because it is mental and you are being programmed to think one way – that you are inferior. And there were many kids who started to believe it and said,

yes, we are inferior. And so, we saw that and we wanted to change it. But that would be my statement on putting things into an historical perspective.

EV: Now, let me move on to another little section. What do you think about the present momentum of commingling Chicano history into a Hispanic blob? Do you think that Mexican-American history deserves to be studied on its own over and above Hispanic history?

LC: Again, the history of the indigenous people of this country is linked to Mexican-American history. I don't think we can isolate just Mexican-American history and just Peruvian history because the indigenous people of Peru suffered the same injustices that the indigenous people of Mexico suffered, that the indigenous people of the Southwest suffered.

EV: Let me reword my question: Do you think that the Mestizo- Mexican history . . . when I thought about Mexican history, Chicano history, I agree with you – I am thinking that you have to include Native American history in the history of Chicano history or Mexican-American history. But what I am wondering is whether or not . . . I see some tendencies that they try to engulf us, engulf this history into a more generic Hispanic history.

LC: Well, if we are in Texas, if we are in the Southwest, we have to concentrate on the history of Texas and the history of the Southwest in the interplay between the Anglo culture and the Mexican culture in Texas and in the Southwest. This is the area in which we live. Just as in Texas, we teach Texas history. We don't teach New York history. We don't teach Minnesota history. Minnesota, they teach the history of Minnesota. In Texas, we teach the history of Texas. So, in Texas, we should teach the history of Mexican-

Americans in Texas. In Southwest, in a larger context, we should teach the history of Mexicans in the Southwest. I think that there should be a course that covers a global history of Latin Americans in the Americas but it should be treated separately, as a separate course, from the history of Mexicans in Texas, Mexicans in the Southwest. Just as we wouldn't globalize Texas history by saying O.K., we're going to study Texas history and we're going to begin with the arrival of the Aborigines in Australia. Excuse me? So, no, there are points of logic that have to be observed.

EV: Yes, I kind of see a tendency of going . . .

LC: I suppose that tendency is due to people wanting to water down the Mexican-American contribution.

EV: Exactly. And I think these yuppie-type young Chicano students we see coming in . . . I think it is a way to, once again, try to become Spanish as opposed to being Mexican. That is my critical observation.

LC: Yes, well, when I was teaching Mexican-American studies, I would ask the kids, "What are you?" And some would say, "I'm Spanish." Some would say, "I'm Mexican." And Mexican-American kids in the United States have always gone through this identity thing – what am I? Just like when I asked my mother, "What kind of American am I?" And, of course, she had gone through it. There are different ways to look at that because we are the product of political intrigue. We are the product of military intrigue. We are the product of economic ventures by Europeans, primarily Spaniards. And we have to put all of that into perspective. The Mestizo came into being, of course, when the Spaniard met the indigenous people of Mexico and South America. And so, when we trace our DNA history, we find that we are a mixture of indigenous people and Spanish. We are

Native American. And many times, Mexican-Americans don't think of ourselves as Native American but we are Native American. If we trace the DNA of our mothers, invariably we are going to see that our mother's mother's mother's mother's mother's mother's mother was indigenous. And then, if we trace our fathers, we are going to see that our father's, father's, father's, father's, father was Spanish 85% of the time because we are a mixture of indigenous and Spanish. But basically, we are now an indigenous people of this continent. Yes, we have that mix but we can't sit there and say, "I claim Spanish," "I claim Mexican," "I claim indigenous." We need to claim what the facts are.

EV: Yes, there are probably a lot of politics mixed up with social positions. I was raised, as probably you were, with the idea that you don't really recognize, you don't claim anything Spanish because te crees mucho, do you know what I am saying?

LC: Yes.

EV: And so, other than language, which we have kind of fractured along the board with our slang, but we do keep the Spanish thing and maybe the guitar as the musical centerpiece, but other than that, we don't really study our Spanish background that much. We don't really try to validate it or try to give it any type of position in our culture and our lives. And I am wondering, number one, do you think that would ever come about or do you see that at some point, we might say, Hey, you know what? Let's go check out our Spanish background and see what is there?

LC: I think we should check out both – our Spanish heritage and our Mexican heritage. I believe that we should all be proficient bilinguals in Spanish and English. I would love to learn Navarro. I would love to learn an indigenous tongue. I think that would be great. In fact, I made attempts to learn a few words and I wish I could devote

the time to do more. I play the guitarra which is Spanish and I sing Mexican songs. I don't sing well. But I play Mexican songs on the Spanish guitarra. I play Adelita. So, this is part of our Mestizo, Mestizaji, as we are this mixture, but we are more closely aligned to Mexico because we are more recent historical arrivals from Mexico. We are more recent historical arrivals from Mexican culture and Mexican history. We use the molecajete. We eat the aguacate. We cut the sacate in the yard. We don't cut the grama as the Spanish would say. We don't cut the basto as the Spanish would say. We say, in Texas, "Vamos a cortar el sacate," which is an Aztec word. Vamos a cortar el sacate. And so, we are more closely linked to our Mexican roots than our Spanish roots but we still have the language and we still have that tie. And there is nothing wrong with that. We should enrich ourselves with the best from all these cultures but we are more closely linked to the Mexican. Nationalistically, we are more closely linked to our Mexican identity. And the people from Spain see us more as Mexican than as Spaniards. And that is always the case. I think that there are people who have identity problems and want to be identified as Spanish only because they have an identity crisis or they feel that somehow, that is superior because they want to be more European. I see some of that coming from Argentina. I see some of that coming from Venezuela. But I don't think it should come from Texas and Arizona and California and New Mexico because our history and our culture is Mexican. After all, we are sitting here in Houston, Texas which was Mexico.

EV: Well, this is why I said earlier – my personal view is that while I would like to have, for lack of a better term and just for the sake of our discussion now – a working relationship with other Hispanic groups, I don't see where I have a whole lot in common

with any Cubanos, Argentinos. As a matter of fact, they pretty much solder off their indigenous people anyway. So, as a Mestizo myself, I immediately had no connection with them at all. And most of them . . . well, not most of them but so many of them are Italian so you don't even have the Spanish connection . . . the only area is Mendosa which has the Spanish connection but, I mean, I feel much closer culturally or colaguna or what is the word for sympathy in Spanish? Not even sympathy but much more . . . I have a better sense of kinship with the Matecos, for example. Any form of middle America. But once you start getting into South America and going down where the Europeans have just wiped out the native groups, I don't have . . . I have a connection because of the sense of humor, I mean, the language, and they do the music – they pick up on our Mexican music and vice-versa but as far as _____ what we eat, what we kid about, what our humor is. It is pretty distinct. It is very different. And so, that is kind of why I brought that . . .

LC: But from a political perspective, I think it is important for all of these people to unite politically.

EV: Oh, absolutely. Yes, I have no problem with that. I just have a fear that, number 1, we are going to allow ourselves to be deluded into a Hispanic mixture and then by that, they are going to knock out the Mexican-American programs and they are going to start spoon feeding these new arrivals from Argentina and _____ into believing the old myths that you are talking about, the old myths of Texas history and the Alamo and all that bullshit.

LC: That is a scenario. I don't think it is a very probable scenario. I don't think it is going to happen but it is an interesting scenario.

EV: If I can find something to worry about in the future historically, I am going to do it! I hope I am not paranoid about this. I don't want my grandkids to have to go through this all over again. I just have one more question: Have you written any of your experiences down? Do you have journals and stuff that you have written this stuff down in, recorded?

LC: No.

EV: Oh wow! This is the first one?

LC: I did an interview with this gentleman who used to work for Decolores Productions. What was his name? I can't think of his name right now. Rodriguez?

EV: Oh, I remember that.

LC: He is a Puerto Rican gentleman – a real nice guy. Great cameraman. He used to work with Betty Maldonado, and I cannot think of his name. But he did a tape. I don't know what happened to him. He did a videotape. They were doing something on AAMA. And we sat down and just talked and talked and talked.

EV: Let me sign off of this. This is the end of the interview with Dr. Cano. We are signing off.