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Interview no. 186

Marta Salas-Porras

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Marta Salas-Porras (1954-)
INTERVIEWER: Rhonda Hartman and Sarah E. John
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

1975 Sun Carnival Queen.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Experiences in South Africa; the Sun Carnival; Mexican American participation in the Sun Carnival; Mexican American organizations.

45 minutes.
23 pages.

BICENTENNIAL

H: Marta, could you tell us when and where you were born?

S: I was born in Los Angeles, California, June 22nd, 1954.

H: Where are your parents from?

S: My parents are from El Paso.

H: Could you tell us something about your school years--where you attended school and any influential experiences that may have occurred?

S: Yes. I attended grade school in Los Angeles until the fifth grade when I went to Zack White School here in El Paso. Then I went to Coronado High School. I was active in sports, speech and drama. I participated in the student government there at the high school. I graduated from Coronado in 1972 and I was selected as a Rotary Exchange Student to South Africa. I spent four months at a Dutch prep school. I learned to speak Afrikaans, which is a Dutch-German dialect, and I lived in a small village of about 4,000 people. Then I moved to Capetown and attended the University of Capetown. That year had a great deal of influence on my life, I'm sure.

H: When did you move to El Paso...after fifth grade?

S: Yes. After fifth grade. After I went away to South Africa I came back and attended the University of Texas at Austin, and then I transferred to UTEP.

H: How do you think the year in Africa has influenced you?

S: It influenced me a great deal politically. I became very politically oriented because it's a very political country. I saw conditions that I had never been exposed to before.

H: Such as?

S: Such as a lot of different medical situations. I did volunteer work in a Black hospital and in the townships. You become very culturally oriented. You begin to learn the cultures of different people. It's so condensed--in South Africa you have so many tribes. It definitely broadened my outlook on people and on traveling and on culture a great, great deal.

H: Can you recall any ethnically oriented experiences in your own school either in Los Angeles or here when you came to Coronado?

S: No. There's not really any one type of situation I can remember personally. I know that I was in a more competitive situation at the school I attended because of the large percentage of Jewish kids in my classes.

H: This was in Los Angeles?

S: No, at Coronado. And it made me more...it was very competitive. I don't think I really ever had any real personal experience as far as that goes that I can think of at this time.

H: How would you compare the school situation in Los Angeles with here in El Paso [concerning the] Mexican Americans?

S: Well, since I was very young I never was aware of this. As far as the fifth grade goes, up to the fifth grade I never was aware of any type of prejudice or things of that sort.

H: Did they have a bilingual education type thing or was everybody in English or did they put all the Mexican American kids in one class?

S: No, we were all together. We had Spanish on television. A lot of our classes were on television.

H: But it was mostly English oriented?

S: Well, yes, it was English oriented.

H: What are you studying now at UTEP?

S: I'm studying Advertising. I'm an Advertising major. I have a very strong interest in graphic arts and advertising. [I have] a minor in languages.

H: So what do you plan to do when you finish here?

S: I want to work with a firm in advertising and maybe later...I'm very interested in the Foreign Diplomatic Service.

H: Which languages are you taking?

S: I'm not taking any languages here at UTEP. All the languages I've learned to speak have been in the country that I've been.

H: Which are?

S: I speak Spanish and English, and I speak a Dutch dialect--Dutch-German-- and I speak an African language, which is Xhosa. I want to become fluent in Portuguese, Italian and French, which I still have to go.

H: How did you get involved in the Sun Carnival?

S: Well, it's a pretty long story. My grandmother is from a very old pioneer family here in El Paso and she was a member of the club The Pan American Roundtable--one of the founding members. I was asked by The Pan American Roundtable, which is one of the only civic organizations here in El Paso that have women from both sides of the border. This club started to get women from both sides of the border to know each other since we are so close together. It's a very worthwhile civic organization. They asked me if I would represent them in the Sun Carnival. So I thought, "Well, for two weeks, sure." Little did I know! [Laughter]

H: Could you explain to us the process that was followed in order to choose the Princess by The Pan American Roundtable?

- S: They get a list of the members' daughters, granddaughters, friends, or whatever, and there is the Board who meets and they select a girl. They have a picture of her and a little biographical sketch of what she's doing and what she's done. Most of the members know the daughters and the granddaughters and the friends of the other members.
- H: Do you know what they choose on--mostly on activities or poise or what the mother has done in the organization?
- S: I think they select you mostly on if you will represent their club the way they want someone to represent their club.
- H: What is the purpose of this organization other than getting the women on both sides of the border to know each other?
- S: Well, it's a pretty big purpose involved because this way the women in El Paso are exposed to the women in Juárez, and the women in Juárez are exposed to the women in El Paso. There are a lot of friendships that have started this way. Also, with our foreign diplomatic people here in El Paso, such as at Fort Bliss, the German officers' wives are involved with this and the different people that are stationed at Fort Bliss are also involved with this. It's a worthwhile thing because you get people from other parts of the country coming in and being stationed in El Paso and many of them make their homes here. This way they meet a nice group of people from both sides of the border. And they have very worthwhile projects. They have the scholarship funds for students. This year they had a boy from South El Paso [who] was chosen and he got a scholarship here to UTEP. They do a lot of worthwhile projects between both sides, so it's nice.
- H: What do they do in their meetings?
- S: They have regular meetings. They talk about their projects that

they're working on, and they have a program, usually, with speakers. Another very important thing is that they hold their meetings in the homes of people on both sides of the border, so that women on this side of the border actually go into the homes of the women in Juárez, which is very interesting and I think really important that people realize that there are people just as normal on the other side of the border.

H: Before the rules were changed for the selection of the Sun Queen in 1970, there had been no Mexican American Sun Queens in the 35 year history of the Carnival and only 7 Princesses, or Duchesses as they were called then. Do you have any thoughts on why that was so?

S: At that time it happened that there weren't any Mexican Americans who were very strongly involved with the Sun Carnival. I think it's changing year after year. You can see the progressive change in people that have gotten involved, that had dynamic personalities, who wanted to change the Sun Carnival in a positive way to make it not a social club but a community effort, which it now is beginning to be. In the last five years I think the people in El Paso are finally becoming a part of the Sun Carnival and realizing that it's the only community thing that we have here in El Paso. And it's not just a beauty contest, that a girl's chosen. It's PR for the city. I've traveled to a lot of places and you do a lot of PR for El Paso. The Sun Carnival brings in more tourism than any time of the year. This is what makes the businesses go, from the hot dog stand all the way up to the hotels.

H: Could you tell us how the Queen was selected before 1970 and how this process is carried on now?

S: Well, I'm not exactly sure how it was done before. I know that it was done with a selection Committee before and the Selection Committee chose a girl from a group of girls that were selected as "Duchesses" then. Then they changed it to the "Princesses" because they realized that the order was Princess-Queen. So the Duchesses are out-of-town girls who come from all over the Southwest representing their small cities and their area, such as Roswell, Santa Fe, Alamogordo, Las Cruces, Ruidoso and so forth. They come in and it's a worthwhile thing for them because they represent their area. Then the Princesses are chosen from about 18 to 20 civic organizations here in El Paso. These girls go to parties given by the civic organizations and they go to luncheons given by the Lions Club and the Rotary Club and so forth--men's clubs. Then they're interviewed by out-of-town judges. The out-of-town judges have never seen the girls, have no idea what they're like until they meet with them and they interview them. They ask them different questions. They meet with them about three or four times. They are people from all over. We had the lady from Charro Days down in Brownsville, Mrs. Hinojosa, and we had a lady from Dallas, and John Asmus from Continental Airlines. They get a good cross section of people from all over to come in to interview the girls.

J: Do you think this had a more positive effect on the choosing of these girls because [the judges] are from out-of-town and they have no, let's say, prejudices?

S: I think it's very much so--much better this way. I think it's more exciting for everyone because the people that go to the Coronation are involved or know somebody who's in it or put up a girl. It's more exciting for them because it's done in a more fair way.

H: Since this new process was initiated, two of the five Queens have been Mexican American--Dolores Pellicano and yourself. Do you think that this new method makes it more possible for the Mexican American population of El Paso to be more equally represented in the Sun Carnival?

S: Well, I think it's more a matter of the Mexican American population getting involved in the Sun Carnival. I think a lot of people can stand up and say, "We're not included in the Sun Carnival." I think it's a matter of getting out there and doing a little work and getting involved. There are lots of people that are involved with the Sun Carnival that are Mexican Americans and I saw hundreds of the Lions Club and Rotarians out there working. I think that as far as being represented, I think that any Queen who represents El Paso has a responsibility to represent the Mexican American as well as represent the Anglo, because you're representing the city and the people in the city. I not only represent El Paso, but the Southwest and Juárez because they are included in the Sun Carnival. They have a girl that represents Juárez that's included in the festivities.

H: This year there's only one Mexican American represented on the Court--Mary Lou Carbajal. Why is it that more Mexican American girls are not being nominated by the various civic organizations which send Princesses to the Sun Carnival?

S: Well, I think maybe in the past there have been quite a few girls that were Mexican Americans that have been representing clubs. I think it's just a matter of people getting involved in these organizations because they're not social clubs--they're civic organizations.

I think it's changing every year, but maybe a reason for that might be that more people aren't getting involved; some of the girls that are Mexican Americans are not involved in this way.

H: Do you have any ideas of how to get them more involved? Is it that they don't care or the people in the organizations have such a clique that they can't get in, or what?

S: No, I don't think it's so much that. That's a very hard question to answer. It would probably take about two hours. The one thing I realized is that a lot of kids have a very negative attitude towards a lot of things, whether they're Mexican Americans or Anglos. I think it's a very bad attitude to have. I believe in El Paso, and El Paso's my home. It's not that I'm in a clique or anything, it's just that I'm very active in what's happening in El Paso. I think there are a lot of kids that would like to be more active if they could just, maybe, find a niche or some way to get involved. I really don't find any separation between cultures, whereas I find a separation between people and their attitudes and what they want to challenge. It's not so much that one's a Mexican American and doesn't want to challenge and the other is an Anglo and he's gung ho. It's just that I find that different people operate differently. And I think that now, the students [are] changing as far as the Mexican American goes. The student is not so much saying, "Hey, look, I'm a Mexican American; I need a break." But he's saying, "Hey, I want an education and I'm going to get it." There's a big difference. As soon as people begin to realize that we're all the same and you've got to get out there and work...nothing's going to be handed to you

on a silver platter. I have, I guess, a lot of opinions about this, but that's the way I feel about it.

H: What have been some of your duties as the Sun Queen this year?

S: I've given a lot of speeches all over El Paso to high school groups; graduating classes, Future Homemakers of America, Future Farmers of America. And practically every civic organization has invited me to speak to them--a lot of the Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, Kiwanis Clubs. I traveled to Florida to the De Soto Festival and rode in their parade, and to Minneapolis where I rode in the Aquatennial. I went to Austin, Texas for the Aqua Fest and to Roswell and Ruidoso. Two of the other girls went to Lovington--Judy Fairlane and Helene Farah went to Lovington, New Mexico. We've gone to Las Cruces and communities around El Paso.

H: What do you do when you go to these other places?

S: I give speeches.

H: What do you give speeches on?

S: El Paso--everything from the history of El Paso to the history of the Sun Carnival and trying to educate people more about El Paso because a lot of people don't even know about their own city. That's mostly what I like to speak on--the city of El Paso.

H: Have you faced any type of discrimination in carrying out these duties either here or in other areas of the Southwest?

S: No, I never have, not at all. In fact, I've been welcomed everywhere I've been, by the people. In fact, I think people were more amused by my last name than discriminating.

H: What do you find to be the attitude of people outside of the Southwest toward El Paso and Texas--the Southwest in general?

S: Well, that's a very difficult question because from the East there are people who think... I remember up in Boston this lady said to me, "Do you have running water?" I said, "Yes, when we turn on the faucets." People are ignorant everywhere about places they haven't been, and I think that this is common everywhere. I know that people in California think that we live in a small growing town. In Texas I think the people underestimate El Paso and its future capabilities. I found this. I found that a lot of people aren't too aware of what is going on in the city--even in the city, people that live here.

H: Such as what?

S: Everything that we have to offer here. For example, the students here at the University didn't even know that we had won the NCAA track title, which is a very sad thing, because if you don't have the students of the school supporting the school then they really don't have a voice to complain. I don't think they have any voice in complaining about the school if they themselves don't participate in it.

H: From what you've been able to observe and from what you remember about the past, why do you think that the amount of Mexican American participation in the Sun Carnival as a whole has been fairly minimal?

S: Because it started out with a very small group of people, and I think that what needs to be done is that people need to start getting involved. This is the number one thing--in any way getting involved in the Sun Carnival because it's growing year after year. It's becoming bigger and better and I think it's a matter of getting involved with it and becoming active in things that they enjoy. There's so many events now that people should latch onto an event that they enjoy and work towards it. I think the Sun Carnival, too, is at fault for

not reaching out to every area of the community. It's a very difficult thing to do because of the lack of money, first of all, and time. They can reach so far because there is limited money; but with the growth of it I think year after year they should be able to expand it more and more and more.

J: Do each of the organizations that sponsor young ladies to be in the Sun Carnival put up the money to send you to the parties? Do you buy your own clothes or do they buy your clothes; do they put up money for the activities that you're involved in while you were on the Court--things like that?

S: There's an entry fee for each girl for the Sun Carnival. [The organizations] put up this completely and you are a guest at every party of that organization. So you don't pay for that. You wear your own clothes. Some people think that the clothes are very important. People say, "Ah, you had to buy all those clothes." No. I just wore my same old clothes.

J: I'm interested in that because I wondered if some organizations, perhaps, didn't have the ability, let's say, to either put up the entrance fee or [those] who might have wanted to get involved just couldn't afford to get their girls into these things. I wondered if it was very expensive to get the girls in here.

S: I think it's \$100, I'm not really sure. I could find out for you. I'm not real sure about how much it is but I know that people realize that this is a community effort and getting involved in it is worth the money because it's the only thing we have here--it's the largest festival [west]of Dallas and [east]of California.

- H: Do you know anything about the floats? I think they're supposed to cost a couple thousand dollars.
- S: But the organizations don't do that. They don't put up the floats.
- H: No, not the ones that sponsor the Princesses, but just in general do you think that the cost of putting in a float would prohibit some Mexican American organizations from doing it?
- S: I don't see why it would because I think when people get together they can find a way to do it.
- H: Do you have any suggestions on how the Sun Carnival can reach the Mexican American more?
- S: Appealing more to the young people, I think, is one step that they're going to have to go because I really believe in the young people. El Paso is the youngest city in Texas, and we don't cater to the young people here at all. It's a thing that's going to have to change. It's something that's going to have to change very, very soon.
- H: What kind of activities could they incorporate to get the young people more involved?
- S: I'd like to see a club started for the young people--let's say, people under 30 and high school graduates could join. Anyone could join it.
- J: This would be like a civic or a community active group?
- S: A community active group. And have people from all over the city join this club--young people. I think this would be really, really great. I think it would be really worthwhile because then you'd get a real good cross section of people that want to be actively

involved, and here they find a way to get involved. I'm hoping to suggest this this year so that maybe it will go in action in the next two years or so. I think it would be worthwhile.

H: Right now are there any activities that are specifically geared toward the Mexican American? I know they have the bull fight in Juárez, but other than that is there anything to really get them involved, any attempt? Or do they just say, "Come if you want to and if you don't, too bad."?

S: Well, the Sun Carnival's geared to the city, and as far as I'm concerned the people, whether they be Mexican Americans or Anglo or whatever, are all invited to all the activities from the bike race to the tennis tournament. They have bowling and they're going to have the car slalom at Bowie High School. There's quite a bit of events that people can get involved in. The entry fees are very, very minimal. I think it's \$2.50 to enter the Sun Carnival Tennis Tournament.

H: You kind of touched on this a little bit before, but could you tell us just briefly what are some of the benefits to El Paso that the Sun Carnival brings?

S: Well, some of the benefits are that it brings lots of tourism to the city. Also, it gives the community something to work together on, which I think is important. As far as bringing things into the city, I think it brings a lot of new people into the city. I know that a lot of people have been to the Sun Carnival. I've met [them] somewhere else and they say, "Yeah, we're going back there. We really enjoyed it." They had a good time here. I think it spreads

the word of El Paso a lot--the Sun Carnival does. I know it's really funny--the Sun Carnival has these little sun buttons that you can stick on to represent the Sun Bowl Game and the Sun Carnival, little stick-on sunbursts. It was really funny because I went to Florida and gave some out to some people. I was watching television--the Pittsburgh Pirates were playing--and a guy had it in his cap. You know, it was really funny. And then this old lady wrote from Minneapolis and she said that someone had given her a sunburst and she still had it. It's just little things. But I think any exposure for El Paso is good. It's a growing city and I think it's real good. I don't promote El Paso as the city of tomorrow or anything because I really like El Paso as more the Western city, the flavor of yesterday, the multicultural city we have, because it's not just bilingual--it's just not a bilingual city.

J: I've come across people who have said to me that all El Paso has to offer is Juárez. And I can go into long discussions about "this isn't true." But, of course, I've seen it everywhere--"El Paso is the gateway to México." People just seem to forget sometimes that El Paso does have a lot to offer in itself besides being just the last stop before you hit México. I was just wondering, do you come across any of this in other places? Do people just look at El Paso as a place to get out of the country more or less?

S: Well, when I give speeches about El Paso I always say it's the international city. Without Juárez we wouldn't be the international city and they wouldn't be the international city. We wouldn't be the largest city on any international border.

J: Certainly Juárez does attract, but I just wondered if any people are really aware that El Paso in itself is a very interesting place.

S: I've given lots of speeches where I talked about El Paso and I always see people going, "Oh really? Gosh, I didn't know that." We have the national record for sunshine here. A lot of asthmatic people come down here for health problems. It's a very healthy place to be because of the sunshine and because of the dryness. Medically speaking, it's a very good place to settle down. A lot of people like it because we have a dry cold. We don't have the wet and rainy cold that a lot of people suffer from in different parts of the country. There are a lot of things that the city offers that people within even our own peers complain about because they don't know anything about it. Recreationwise we have a perfect area. You can leave anywhere from here and be in the snow and be in the sand. A lot more PR could be done. Of course, I blame that a lot on the Chamber of Commerce. But, of course, that's my own personal opinion once more. I feel that the Chamber lacks a lot of orientation towards the Mexican American here and refuses to accept El Paso as a, let's say, multi-cultural city and a Latin oriented city, which is a big flare for people to come here--our architecture, everything is very different.

H: Can you think of any benefits that the Sun Carnival has brought to the Mexican American community as separate from El Paso as a whole? Specifically Mexican American.

S: I think it's given them a chance to get involved in something. Through their organizations they can become involved in [it]. I think that it's given them a chance to participate in different

events, in different activities. A lot more are offered because of the Sun Carnival, than let's say, if there wasn't a Sun Carnival--they might enter a Parks and Recreation tournament or something. Let's say the guy who doesn't have too much money is going to enter this little tournament. This way, the Sun Carnival provides something big and spectacular that they can enter with the same minimal amount of fee. It's just a matter of becoming aware of this. Maybe it's a fault of people that are involved in the Sun Carnival that don't make it aware to these people, but I think that it's a matter of if you're willing to get involved then you're willing to check up on things and investigate things.

J: Maybe I'm putting words in your mouth and you can contradict if you want. Would you say, then, that many times the Sun Carnival, just itself as it has been built up (let's say before 1970), was a turn-off? Perhaps many of the Mexican Americans in El Paso have felt that it was an Anglo American--it was his Sun Carnival. After 1970, since we have outside elements choosing the Queens and so forth, would this make more Mexican American people involved in it now? Is it still a big turn-off? I'm wondering if that would have something to do with it.

S: I think it has gotten other people involved since then. And I do really believe that in the last three or four years it has changed in a more positive way towards the Mexican American. I only hope that in the next five years we'll see the Mexican American really getting involved in El Paso. But, you know, like I told the Sun Carnival, "You're discriminating against the majority here in

El Paso, which is not the Mexican American--it's the young people." With this, I think that more Mexican Americans will get involved because there's a lot of Mexican Americans that are young people that aren't involved in anything, and this is bad. I think this is when you get problems and dissention and all this--is when people aren't involved in something that's worthwhile and feeling a part of something. I've never believed in separate clubs such as separate clubs that are organized to help one group of people. I don't believe in this because they're defeating their own purpose. Let's say if a group of Mexican American students got together and formed a club and became "this club" and together they are creating a separate type of thing... I don't believe in this. I feel that they're defeating their own purpose--fighting against something that they themselves are creating. They are creating this separate little society, this separate little club and only their people can join. I think this is wrong because we can't live like this. We have to mix and we have to say, "Hey, look. Just because I'm a Mexican American doesn't mean anything. I'm going to be great, I'm going to work and I'm going to get to the top whether my name is José or my name is John." And I think it's a negative attitude to have, and I think it's going to change very quickly because students are realizing that they are not going to be handed anything, that they're going to have to work. I don't believe in these separate clubs because I think that they are alienating themselves from reality. And people say, "Yes, but they need to help themselves. They have to teach each other." All it is, is a bunch of fights. They fight within each other--"Hey, you talked to John and you didn't talk to José,"--big fights. It's a complete waste of time. If they're going to do something constructive let them all get together and say, "Look. Let's get

together and instead of creating something for 'our people' let's try to help our people. Instead of creating an image, let's try to help them get with it." I have not known of this, of any let's say ethnic organization here on this campus that has gotten up there and done worthwhile, constructive things for "their" people such as saying, "Hey, look. There's 50,000 scholarships offered. Apply for them you and you and you." No, no, no. They're fighting about, "Well, we're going to get this guy to come and speak." This is a waste of time. This isn't the way the world runs and the way things are. And I'm very, very much against this because I think that it isn't constructive and it isn't helping "the" people involved with it. It's just causing more and more, I think, bitterness than it is causing anything constructive.

J: I might be playing the devil's advocate, but would you carry that as far as talking, let's say, about LULAC or any of these older types of clubs?

S: As far as LULAC goes, I'm not very, very familiar with it. I was campaign manager for Dick Azar for "Rey Feo" and I met some of the LULAC people, but I don't believe in having separate clubs like this. It's not right. Like the students that are here on campus that have their club, the Mexican Americans; I think this is wrong because they're not doing anything constructive for these people. They do absolutely nothing constructive for these people. All they do is have a bunch of fights. I think when you begin to create separate little identities this is wrong, because your name and your background never change. You can never change this in any way. I'll always be a Mexican American and that's the way it's going to be. I mean, there's

no way I can go and live in Sweden and become a Swede. Maybe with my passport, but that's about all. And I think that people should be proud of this and should work hard to be just as good as the guy next door. But when you start to separate and get these little clubs I think they begin to alienate themselves even more and in my opinion, they're creating something they're fighting against.

H: Do you think they're kind of being discriminatory in the opposite sense?

S: They're discriminating and yet they themselves are...they're creating the discrimination. I don't think a lot of people realize that here they are saying, "Oh that guy. That John Brown, oh man." And then here they are in their separate little group and saying, "Pues, esos, los Anglos, they're terrible, they're horrible" and all this stuff. And here they are--the little group. I don't believe in that at all. And that's why I admire the people that have succeeded and have worked hard and become successful people in their field whether it be professional or not professional, whether he be a successful plumber or the successful groceryman. He's worked his way up and not on the crutch of being a Mexican American, but being a hard working person. I think when you use a crutch of having a background it's very wrong. Such as with the scholarships being offered--I think at first it was a good idea because there was a certain bit of discrimination against the Mexican American as far as receiving scholarships, but then it went the other way! They were discriminating against the Anglos! It was terrible. I think that people should not be made to hire a certain percentage of Mexicans, a certain percentage of Blacks, a certain percentage of Anglos. I think they should be allowed to hire people that are competent in their work. And when this is

realized then I think these little groups of kids that are getting together and clubs that are organizing will realize that they're not going to become successful, let's say, by being in this little clique, because they're cliques just like they accuse the others of being cliques. They're not going to win by being in this clique, but they are going to really get out and succeed by working hard and by becoming what they want to do.

J: Are these opinions, do you think, representative of most of the other young people that you know? Do your own friends that you see every day agree for the most part with the way you feel?

S: Well, I think a lot of my friends are tired of this business. I have a very large cross section of friends from every type of background. I don't have just one certain type of friend that lives up in the Country Club. All my friends, the kids that I know, I know intellectually and because of their personality. I get along with them and I associate with them--not because "they live here and he lives here, and, well, if he lives over there I'm not going to talk to him." That's not the way I operate. I think people are finally changing and they're finally realizing, "Hey, you know that Juan Sánchez, he's really a nice guy." And it's when you have these small groups that create even more, I think, a negative attitude towards the Mexican American because the guy says--yea, he's a member of so-and-so club and they just hang around with their own group. I know that I have never voiced an active opinion here on campus with this group of students because as a silent observer I've seen what's happened. I've been in the meetings, sat in on the meetings when I've seen bickering and fighting over very trivial things that aren't

going to help their group at all.

H: How long have you been here at UTEP?

S: I've been here 2 years. It's really funny because I've seen things change since when my brothers and sisters were in school here. My sister was in a sorority--she was a Mexican American and this was back in the 60s. And it was because she was smart, she worked hard, she studied and she proved herself. It's not a matter of proving yourself to the Anglo, but proving yourself to be just as good as anybody else. My brother was in a fraternity and they were thought of and looked upon as just as much as the other guys. I think it's a matter of getting in there and studying and fighting for what you want to do. The problem, I think is that the Mexican American doesn't help himself in a constructive way. You see ethnic groups such as the Jewish people, such as the Syrians, together as a group. They've succeeded because the Jewish guy will not buy off the other guy--he'll buy from his friend the Jewish guy. Together they help themselves. For some reason I see that the Mexican American isn't like that as far as I've been exposed to. He's in it because he wants to pull himself up because of all this...I think it's been more of a group thing. I think they have to realize that they cannot survive that way in little cliques because they're fighting against something they are creating.

H: Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

S: I guess sometimes it's very easy to have an opinion on something, but what I've been exposed to and what I've seen--and I've been exposed to a lot of unbelievable prejudice, especially when I spent my year in South Africa. You're exposed to problems and conditions that

exist nowhere and people think they have hard conditions here. If they could turn around and see the guy across the street they'd be in bitter shock. Maybe because I've been exposed to this I don't take as many things in stride as people take for granted. I really believe in bilingual education; I think it's important. I really think it's important for this area because any language you learn can only be to your benefit. And people here have realized, in the last five years especially, realized--it's grown so much--that being bilingual not only helps them as a person, but in their business, whether it be the Mexican learning to speak English or whether it be the Anglo learning to speak Spanish.

H: Anything you'd like to add?

S: I've been with a lot of students from different cultures. I was a guide on a tour of the United States for foreign exchange students for five weeks across the United States. That is a very interesting thing because you have a cross section of people from different economic levels and different backgrounds--which proved to be very, very interesting. You start to realize a lot of things about people and about why they're that way. It's because of their culture and their background that they are that way. I think sometimes we have to maybe cater to this culture and this background to have a more pleasant surrounding. I think it's working together and getting out there and really working for it. I think that we must retain our culture and our background. I think it's important to keep your nationality, the culture that you grew up with, that you're a part of. But it's also a very, very important part, I think, to become a part of the whole. And that is every culture together, mixing. And

that is why I think that people should not lose their cultural identity, but yet still become a part of the overall picture. Thank you.

H&J: Thank you very much.