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Interview no. 258

Enriqueta R. Lopez

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Enriqueta R. López (1908-)
INTERVIEWER: Hilario Hernández, Jr.
PROJECT: Class project
DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 27, 1976
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TRANSCRIBER: Hilario Hernández
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Lifelong resident of El Paso; attended local schools; owner of La Hacienda Café with her husband.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; educational experiences; the word "Chicano;" ethnic discrimination; history of La Hacienda Café; political involvement in the community.

1 hour, 17 pages

(This is an interview with Mrs. Enriqueta Rubio López and her daughter, Mrs. Virginia López by Hilario Hernández, Jr., at La Hacienda Cafe, 1720 W. Paisano, in El Paso, Texas. The date is November 27, 1976.)

H: A little bit of history on this building. This building is one of the first buildings to be built in El Paso by Simeon Hart. Later it was bought by Mr. and Mrs. López. This building also stands next to what used to be the original Fort Bliss, the military reservation here in El Paso.

H: Mrs. López, tell me a little bit about yourself--your background and your place of birth.

L: My place of birth is El Paso, the 9th of March of 1908 at 126 Leon Street, where the Civic Center now stands. I was born in the very corner of Durango and... Afterward they built the Hotel Leon Durango.

H: Did you have any formal education here in El Paso?

L: I just had my regular formal education.

H: The elementary grades?

L: Yes.

H: What schools did you go to?

L: First I went to Aoy School. From Aoy I transferred to Alta Vista School. From Alta Vista, I transferred to Guardian Angel School on account of difficulties that I had in those years, on account of being Mexican.

H: So what you're saying is that there was a difference in race, as far as you know?

L: Yes.

H: And this was in 1908?

L: No. No, I was born in 1908; this was in 1921.

H: What kind of problems did you meet up with, as far as being a Mexican?

L: Well, my mother was born here in El Paso, too, and she was very careful with

me. She would dress me the best she could and even had a lot of starch on my clothes. And the kids there, most of them were Anglos; among them, Mexicans, maybe there were seven. I can even mention them. Do you want me to mention them?

H: All right.

L: The Martínez brothers and sisters, the Arvisus; and I have forgotten the rest. Anyway, I was there, and they would feel funny, I guess. They disliked me so intensely that they would call me "nigger."

H: Do you know the reason for this?

L: No. They just said, "Oh, you nigger." They went by me and said, "Oh, you nigger," because I was really clean and dressed up. That's the only thing I could find wrong, in my own sense. And others would say, "You Indian." Nobody could call me a "dirty Mexican" because I was not dirty. Then I got in a dispute with the boys and girls; they would wait for me or I would wait for them, and we would have tussles. We would fight and we'd wrestle and everything, outside. And I'd get home with half my clothes off. So then I told my mother I did not want to be in that school anymore. This is how I changed so soon to Guardian Angel School. In Guardian Angel School, it was a little bit better because there were more Mexicans. There were a few Anglos, very few Anglos. There were the Saultners, and I forget the names of the others.

H: Would you say the school was composed of Mexicans and Anglos.

L: And a few Italians.

H: Would you say the majority was composed of one certain ethnic group?

L: Yes.

H: Which was what?

L: Mexicans; like they used to call us, Spanish Americans.

H: Back then you saw the problems between yourself and the students, as far as

this. Did you see any major problems as far as all the Mexicans?

L: No, not in those years.

H: You didn't see any major problems?

E: No, not in those years. It would be small problems, you know, among kids.

H: Were there any good or bad happenings between students and teachers?

L: Never, never.

H: No problems?

L: No. All the kids, according to my own knowledge, were more or less afraid of the principal and the teachers.

H: Was there any particular reason your parents gave for having you go to school? Was it just because it was a rule here in the United States, or was it to better yourself? Did you have a goal in mind, something to go for?

E: No, it's... In my family, my mother happened to be the only orphan. You see, there were six sisters and she was left orphaned, so she was taken away. She was the only one taken away by one of the aunts that didn't send her to school or college. The other girls all went to Loretto in New Mexico--Our Lady of Visitation. Put it down, because many people have never heard of that, Our Lady of Visitation. It later became Loretto.

H: Loretto Academy?

L: Yes. Then one of the youngest ones went to San Francisco to Our Lady of Carmel and she graduated there and came back when she was 18. So all of them were very, very well educated as far as I could see. The other one went to México City to the school of music. (I learned how to play by ear and learned how to play by this and that, but because I liked it.)

H: Since we're here in the topic of schools back then, do you see any differences in the way the students were back then as to the way students are now?

L: Oh, yes. I believe that most of the... I don't know how to call them--they

want to be called Chicanos, they want to be called mexicanos... Whatever it is, they do not pronounce English well because they don't teach them phonics. In those years, all the teachers, whether they were nuns or not, used to go by phonics, and we had to learn it; and that's the difference. Then they would make us stand in line for one whole week to have Spelling contests among the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh grades, and so forth. And English, how to read English, we couldn't just start reading, we had to learn, "Yes, sir," "No, sir," "May I," "Please," and all of those words. Those are words that we had to give to the people. But we had to learn through an old book; etiquette.

H: You mentioned at the beginning of this answer the idea about how the students want to be referred to--Mexicans, Mexican Americans, Chicanos. Was there any particular term that was used while you were going to school.

L: No. Nothing but mexicanos, Mexicans.

H: Can you remember the first time you heard the word "Chicano?"

E: Well, I heard the word Chicano about 40 or 50 years ago. My great aunt, Mrs. Pilar Little, was married to an Englishman, and one time she brought out that word. There was a bunch of ladies there, and I was there just being nose, as a kid, and I said, "Well, what is Chicano?" And, this is not true; this must be some saying, because she said, "Chicano is something that a chino, a Chinaman, called the Mexican. The Chinaman came here and he saw a man that had a little hog, and he would call this hog, 'Chino, chino, chino,' to feed him. So, he got sore and his feelings were hurt, so he bought a hog and would call the marrano, 'Chicano, chicano, chicano, tu maiz, chicano,'" she said, "and this is how it started." But this does not exist in no books.

H: So, in other words, this was just according to Mrs. Little, your aunt. Did she give any other reason or ideas where she had heard this, aside from this?

- L: No, because in those years, between Calle San Francisco and San Antonio, you could have sheep, you could have goats; and she had two cows. She lived there, and she said that in this corner of San Francisco, there was one family and there was a chino that moved there, a Chinaman. In those years, they used to bring a lot of Chinamen, from China, to become cooks. And we Mexican "greasers"... This is what they called us, but not as an insult.
- H: What is the reason?
- L: The reason is that in those years the Americans railroad started bringing in Mexicans, like they bring Mexicans now for the farms or for everything like that, hands, to grease the wheels. So those were called the Mexican greasers. But it wasn't an insult.
- H: It was just because of the type of work?
- L: The type of work. They used to bring them and their families, and they all lived in those boxcars. Many of them were born there /in the boxcars/, all over the United States. My mother knew when she was working for the city that many didn't even know where they were born because they were born allá adentro.
- H: What is your interpretation of a Chicano, /from/ the information you have right now?
- L: I'll tell it to you the way a teacher told it to me in México. He says, "Keta, don't blame the Chicanos. The reason they're trying to distinguish themselves is because they don't respect them as Mexicans, they do not respect them as Chicanos, and they're not gringos." So, the ones that we have here... You see, we have some here from New York, we have some from California and Arizona. So I /say/, "What do you want to do with your name, or why do you want to change it?" So this is what they tell us, "Look, as Mexicans, they do not respect us, as gringos, menos."

- H: Let me interrupt you. What do you mean by "they?"
- L: The rest of the people, los gringos. /The Chicanos say/, "So we decided we are going to make our own culture, our own race, our own language, our own everything." Now he told me this and he is a school teacher in México City (we have many friends there that are school teachers and well educated people). He said, "Well, I told them that the reason they did not respect them was because they couldn't respect anybody else. 'If you don't respect this or that, he is not going to respect you.' I couldn't make them /understand/." But some are understanding a little better and are now getting to make the rest of the people understand what they are trying to do. Entonces me dijo a mí, "What do you think of that?" I said, "Well, now that you are telling me this, I feel better." But I never did feel all right about them, because if we are not indios, ni mexicanos, or gringos, or españoles (mitad), then what are we? I said, "Now I feel better. I came back, and in my own way I started arguing with the kids and telling them what they told me there."
- H: Have your grandsons, granddaughters, daughters or sons ever asked you, "What are we?" /And/ did you ever tell them, "We are this, we are that."
- L: My granddaughter is 13 and she has never asked me. She knows she is a Mexican. Oh, yes, and does she respect the Mexicans and being Mexican. She even says, "I'd rather move away from here than not be a Mexican. I have to be a Mexican, period." I've had so much trouble growing up here in El Paso that I know what she means. And I said, "You stick to it and keep your space," I said, "just there. If they like you and respect you, you must like them and respect them; but don't be on their heels trying to make friends."
- H: In this same topic dealing with Chicanos and La Raza Unida, the Movement and so forth, did you ever come across or did you ever /know/ of any leaders /who were/ trying to organize for la causa, la raza, los chicanos?

L: Well, you know that I have never found anybody. Those, I only listen to them on television, on channel 4. In fact, I sit down just to criticize them, porque dicen, "la pader," "la vites," "te la llevates," "la trajites." Why in the world don't they learn one or two good Spanish words to stick in there? Well, I guess it's because they're not Spanish.

H: I think you're referring to the programs presently being shown on T.V.

L: Yes; that's why I said it. I knew a young girl, what was her name? She used to work por los Chicanos. She used to come here and I used to help her with four or five dollars for papers or something. She used to live on Mesa Avenue. But I'm so old that I didn't feel like going here and there, ahora menos.

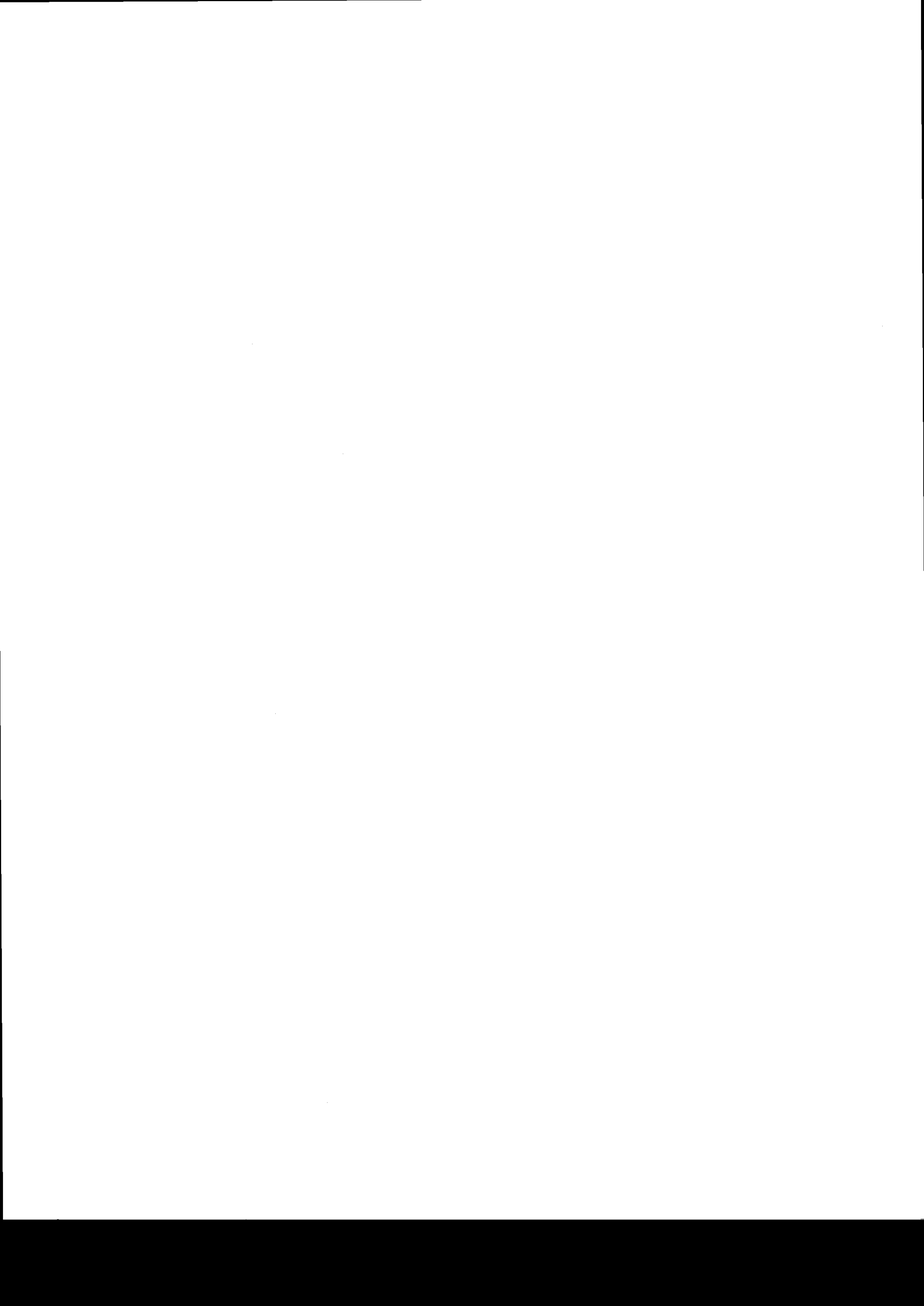
H: You've got more time now. (Laughter) I was referring to, maybe you've heard of Corky González, Reies López Tijerina, César Chávez -- people that are known nationwide.

L: Reies López Tijerina--I feel sorry for him, he hasn't got enough here (head).

H: You don't think so? What is your reason for saying this?

L: Because it's too late. He should have started earlier, a long time ago, say 20 years ago. For instance, a young man like you, start now and learn some few words. Of course, you don't have to learn Spanish, but you need it. Then express to the people what you want. What is it that you want? Recognition, respect; that's what you want. Because money and all of those things have been served to you on a platter. Like the gringos say, "We are tired of serving them on a platter." They say it, and they say it to me. I'm ashamed of that, because as long as I have been here, 68 years, I've never been given one frijol. We've always worked for it. My mother worked for the city. She was a police-woman, the first policewoman. And then she also was a probation officer, and after that she was a...

H: Health inspector?



can you tell me where Simeon Hart was from?

L: He was English, but he pronounced his name Simeon, S-I-M-E-O-N.

H: This place was bought by you in 1940.

L: Sí.

H: We saw the name was Molino de Ponce prior to this, and then the name was changed to La Hacienda.

L: Era Molino de Hart, Hart's Mill.

H: Was there any reason for the change in name?

L: Yes. I changed the name because I thought the place looked more like an hacienda from México than anything else. I told my husband, "Let's call it La Hacienda. There's not one place in El Paso that is called La Hacienda." This is how I registered it.

H: Did you ever have a profession? Were there any difficulties as far as getting to be what you wanted to be?

L: No. When I was young, my idea was that I was going to study music; but since my step-father and my mother separated, it went ka-put. My mother got the job at city hall, and I just went to school, that's all I did, and kept on studying music. Pero just like that, for home use, you know.

H: It wasn't something to live on?

L: Not to live on. I didn't expect to live out of that. I expected to live out of a man--marry. (Chuckles)

H: And this is what you did?

L: Yes, 45 years ago.

H: Your wish came true?

L: Pues, so far so good.

H: Was your husband (or both of you) working on something?

L: No.

H: What type of employment did your husband have?

L: Well, when he came here, he owned a restaurant in Juárez. And since I'm telling you that I was so musically inclined, almost all of the musicians, in Juárez especially, were my friends. I would make tamales, I would make this and that and the other, and I'd invite them home. They would come and play for us and give us free music to dance with, a las muchachas. Y a todos los conocía. And he met one of them, Guillermo Paló. He was, él era quien sabe qué raza. Anyway, he brought him to where I was working. I was working at that time as the floor lady allí en Grants, agarrando a los shoplifters, en W.T. Grants. This is how he met me, y a mí no me gustó mucho el mexicano, pero en fin...

H: Is your husband from El Paso or from México?

L: He's from México, from the state of Jalisco; Guadalajara, Jalisco.

H: Have you been politically involved, been a part of politics here in El Paso?

L: Well, I have always helped, ever since I can remember, because my mother was very, very, very politically inclined. I used to get off from school and go wait for her, and just go with her, walk and walk. Election days, I would walk with her; and it was so different to what it is now. She had a slip of paper this big (regular length), about this thick (1-1 1/2 inches) with the names of all the people in East El Paso, addresses and everything. We would go and call on them. "¿Por quién va a votar Ud.?" "Pues, por éste," o "Por el otro. Pues, oiga, pues yo no sé cómo voy a votar, pues no sé escribir. ¿Cómo le hago?" Entonces mi mamá le decía, "Fíjese bien como están las letras, fíjese bien. Estudie toda esta semana, va a estudiar las letras." ¿Cómo saldría? Yo no sé. Pero es mentira como dicen que les pagaban porque votaran. No es cierto. No les pagaban. Ibamos y les decíamos, "Fíjese como están las letras. Aquí dice Cruz, C-R-U-Z, Cruz." Así estábamos, bastante trabajo. Lo único que sí hacíamos

era que nos daban carro y íbamos por allá. Hasta yo me incluía; yo tenía 10 años pero allí iba yo. Ibamos por ellos y los llevábamos a votar y los hacíamos [que repitieran los nombres] por todo el camino para que no se les olvidara.

H: Thinking back on all of this, what do you think the general impression of the people was, as far as politics? If you were to compare them to the present time, were they more involved in politics, as far as voting, or would you say that right now more people are concerned?

L: Well, right now more people are concerned on different personal interests. But in those days it was just the consejo of Mrs. Méndez, because they loved my mother; and what she said, went. Y le decían, para acabarla de amolar, "la licenciada." (Laughter)

H: Mrs. López, can you remember any other names of people who were involved in politics then?

L: Domingo Montoya, este otro... Ya se me olvidaron los nombres.

H: Who was the mayor at that time? You were 10 years old, right?

L: Yes. Mayores, mayores... Mira, fueron Charles Davis, Charles Kelly (Mayor Kelly), y fue...no me puedo acordar.

H: What about ethnic background? Were there many people with Mexican surnames or Spanish surnames in the government? Not too many, or none?

L: None.

H: None at all?

VL: Eran pocos los mexicanos que salían a votar. If they didn't pick them up, they wouldn't go out.

L: No. In the first place, they didn't know how to write. Others would say this, "Ay, Chihuahua. Comprar Poll Tax, \$1.75... ¿Pues qué me queda para la comida?"

H: Would you say that was one of the barriers, the Poll Tax and the fact that they couldn't read or write?

- L: /Yes/.
- H: What else? Can you think of anything else?
- L: Transportation?
- H: Anything else?
- L: That was all.
- H: That was it?
- L: It was ignorance.
- H: Was there any type of education in schools like you have now, for adults?
- L: Like you have now? No. Do you remember Ramón Telles? Well, he was a good worker, political worker. /I'm talking about/ Richard Telles' and Ramón Telles' father. Because Ramón Telles is not Raymond, it's Ramón.
- VL: He was my grandmother's good friend.
- H: He was one of the few or one of the...
- L: The first one that became elected.
- H: Weren't the schools segregated /at that time/? Some schools had purely Mexican /students/ while other schools...
- VL: The colored kids couldn't go to any school...
- L: Douglas School. That's the only one that was really segregated.
- VL: They had to stay there no matter what. Even if they lived close to /another/ school and they were real, real far /from Douglas/, they would have to go to Douglas.
- L: And in those years, Douglas School used to be on Kansas and Fourth Street. ¿Sabes dónde? Ese edificio raro que lo usan ahora para ocupar viejas para que vengan a trabajar. Esa era la Douglas.
- H: Our Lady's Youth Center?
- L: Esa era la Douglas School. Después hicieron la de allá.
- H: La de la Eucaliptus?

- L: Sí.
- H: Why didn't they just leave it there? Do you know of any reason?
- L: It was too small, not enough capacity.
- H: They couldn't enlarge it?
- L: You know, money always was scarce.
- H: Did you see any political intervention there, as far as moving them?
- L: No, because I didn't live in that neighborhood.
- H: What kind of neighborhood was it?
- L: Well, it was a little fea, muy pobre.
- H: Would you say it was the poorest?
- L: About /the poorest/.
- H: Right now that area is considered the Second Ward, the Southside, El Segundo Barrio.
- L: Pero éso no es porque está apuntado, por éso y por lo otro y por nada. Es porque en aquellos años estaban así: Primer Barrio, Segundo Barrio, Tercer Barrio, y Cuarto Barrio. It was divided into four places like they do in México. En Puebla así está. Igualmente aquí, pero for some reason or other se le quedó el Segundo Barrio.
- H: Which was the first?
- L: Pues todavía no sé cuál será. ¿Cuál será el first one?
- VL: El primero era de los tracks para acá.
- L: Sí, acá. ¿Sabes dónde? Donde estaba la escuela, la Sunset School.
- H: Can you recall the other barrios?
- L: No me acuerdo.
- H: But this is how it got started?
- L: Yes, this is the way it started.
- H: Right now, supposedly the Second Ward is the slum area, the barrio, the lowest

portion of the city.

- L: Do you know that I don't think it's the lowest? And I don't think it's a slum tampoco; I don't think it is. I go by there and I don't think it is. I think there are other places worse than that.
- H: Would you say, the general way the barrio is, has it always been the same?
- L: The same.
- H: The same thing?
- L: Because I remember when I was a little girl my mother had some cousins, their name was Whitehead. They used to live on Stanton y Nueve. Era una vecindad larga, larga, así con cuartos de a dos; así de a dos, de a dos. The girls, I call them girls, they're a little bit younger than I, they lived in Los Angeles. But this great big /house/, grande era, y Mr. Whitehead era el dueño de allí. El no lo tenía sucio, it was always clean and nice, always. I don't remember how many toilets they had.
- H: The reason I am asking /is/ because this is where supposedly main El Paso was, right?
- L: Yes.
- H: The town?
- L: Yes.
- H: Mostly where it is right now, downtown, plus the southside, because it was close to Juárez. That being the main city, why did it remain being the same area, the same type of people and so forth? Yet the surroundings like north-east...
- L: Well, I'll tell you what, many of the people, I still know some people, como la Señora Moreno. La Señora Moreno was born in Arizona. She is 75 years old, and she has lived here all her life, y ahora vive en la Calle Main. Su papá de ella tenía un lumber yard en la Calle South Stanton and Seventh. Vendía carbón y vendía leña; y tenía vaca y vendía leche for years and years. Todavía

cuando tú (Virginia) estabas recién nacidita, vendía leche él, y asaderos.

Pero ellos nomás pudieron y compraron casa. They didn't like it there, porque la gente de Juárez se empesó a venir, "la gentusa," the ugly people.

H: What do you mean by the good and the bad, /la gentusa/?

L: The gentusa is the kind of people that cannot speak...

VL: Or write.

H: Are you talking about the illiterate?

L: They're illiterate in the first place. And in the second place, you want to make friends with them, and they don't want to make friends with you. They think you're... "Oh, es una de esas subida alta. Se cree muy suave." And... goodbye!

H: You're talking about the people that come across, right?

L: Las gentusas esas que conocen las de aquí, así dicen. Y luego las de aquí, ven éso y dicen, "Nosotros no queremos tener nada que ver con esa gentusa."

H: So they are both gentusas, to each other, right?

L: Listen, let me tell you how I heard Richard White speak of himself. Have you ever heard him speak of himself?

H: Not /of/ himself, just speak to the public.

L: I heard him allí en San Elizario. It was beautiful because he said he was part Spanish. And then he described everything, all the trails que tomaron cuando se vinieron, his ancestors, 300 years ago. Y yo me quedé así, 'cause I didn't know.

H: What year was this when you heard him?

E: Three or four years ago.

VL: It was longer than that.

L: Well, sometime like that. Now, there's so many people here that know, that /have/ lived here, /and/ don't say anything. "Ah, we don't know anything."

You know this lawyer Ainsa?

H: Ainsa.

L: A-ín-sa.

H: No, I don't.

L: Nomás que los mexicanos dicen "Encha," y quiero yo decirles /que/ no es Encha, es Aínsa, because he's part Mexican. Su papá vino aquí y abrió el primer wholesale grocery aquí, y tenía puros chinos de empleados. Acuérdense del nombre, Frank Aínsa.

VL: His father was casi dueño de San Francisco.

H: So he's an attorney?

L: Aquí, attorney aquí. Y su hijo es City Attorney ahora.

H: What's his son's name?

L: Pues lo mismo que él, creo.

VL: They used to own the beautiful house on the corner of Mesa and Arizona; you know, the one donde está Malcolm McGregor and all those lawyers.

H: Two story house?

L: Sí, muy bonita, gray one.

VL: It belonged to his parents.

L: Y tienen dos hermanitos así, que apenas caminan; delgaditos, delgaditos.

H: Let me ask you one final question. You've lived your life here in El Paso. Can you think back and recollect all the events, in general, and see how they are, right now?

L: More or less; yes, I do.

H: Can you say that there's been an improvement? Can you say that nothing has gone on? /Or can you say that the Mexican people, the Chicano, is going up?

L: Well, the Mexican, Chicano, he's not way down there, no. But he could do better by himself, like I told you, /by looking for that little thing, which is respect, self-respect, and self-reliance. Not to say, "I don't have to work,

I can go and ask for my estampillas or my renta de la casa." That's the worst thing that they can hear from one of them. Never! Be self-reliant, and love thyself. Love himself first. Know himself. Because most Mexicans are not dumb. It makes me so mad to see... I tell Virginia, como en México I see unos muy vivos y otros muy tontos. Why? We go there and we stay two or three months. My husband has lots of relatives there, and they're all doctors and lawyers. And we just wonder why these people can do better than we can in the United States.

H: In general, do you think that not just the Chicano but the lifestyle here in El Paso is getting better?

L: Yes.

H: Economically it has improved.

L: It has improved. I used to go to a store on El Paso Street, Nations. I could go in there and buy a nickel's worth of dates, one banana for one cent, and things like that. My aunt would say, "Go buy me a quarter's worth of soup bone." With one dollar you could get a whole bag of groceries, and that meant a lot. And then everybody could have their cow, like my aunt. She could have her cow right there. She could give the milk to all of the neighbors. Now tell me, what do they mean, you cannot have a horse, you cannot have nothing! Pretty soon you won't even find bedbugs. Nothing! Everything, vámonos.

H: This concludes our interview for today. I would like to thank my guests, Mrs. Enriqueta Rubio López and her daughter, Mrs. Virginia López, for their contribution in making this tape possible.