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Cleofas Calleros

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Cleofas Calleros (1896-1973)
INTERVIEWER: Oscar J. Martínez
PROJECT:
DATE OF INTERVIEW: September 14, 1972
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

(Social worker; community leader) Born in Río Florido, Chihuahua, on April 9, 1896; full-blooded Indian, Tepehuani and Tarahumara; educated in Chihuahua and at Sacred Heart School in El Paso, Texas.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Early life and migration to El Paso; reenganches and railroad workers; family background; immigration in Juárez-El Paso; conditions for Mexicans in El Paso; educational conditions in El Paso; beginning of work with U.S. Catholic Conference; Mexican evacuation, 1904-1905; housing in El Paso; Díaz-Taft meeting; wages in El Paso; refugees; World War I (brief); deportations of the 1930s; repatriations back to the United States; the term "Chicano."

(Oral History interview with Dr. Cleofas Calleros on September 14, 1972. Conducting the interview is Dr. Oscar J. Martínez of The University of Texas at El Paso.)

M: Dr. Calleros, where are you from originally, and when did you come to El Paso?

C: I was born in Río Florido, Chihuahua, on April 9, 1896, where we remained until I was six months old. From there, we moved to Chihuahua, where we remained until I was six and a half years old. I attended the first grade in the Escuela del Santo Niño de Chihuahua, where I learned my four tables from one to twelve--addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division--and I could read and write with ink. I had already finished...

(INTERRUPTION)

We arrived in El Paso on the Mexican Central Railroad, third class: my mother and my next brother, Martín, and Rita. The reason that my father came to El Paso--about the middle of August of 1902--was due to the fact that he had a contract to transfer the freight and materials at that time to build El Teatro de los Héroes. My father had a wagon pulled by two mules, and another wagon pulled by two horses. One day he had to unload a carload of glass which was destined to the Teatro de los Héroes. As he was loading the glass, an employee of Gov. Luis Terrazas told him to take one load to the Teatro de los Héroes and one load to the Quinta Carolina, which was the Governor's palace-to-be. When my father refused to comply with that request, his wagons and mules and horses were confiscated, and he was put on a freight train coming north to El Paso. He was instructed to come to the United States and never to return to Méxcio.

Of course my mother was worried because she didn't know what had happened to my father or to the horses, but about a week later she received a letter from my father stating that he had obtained a job as a bottle

washer at the El Paso Dairy, and that just as soon as he could gather a little money he would send for us to come to El Paso, which he did about October 1. So my mother, Rita, Martín and I left for El Paso, arriving the night of October 5 in Juárez. My father told my mother to walk under the bridge. As we got to the river, we then walked on the El Paso side and registered as immigrants coming to El Paso to live.

When my father arrived at the immigration station, I asked him why he had asked my mother to come under the bridge, and he said, "Well, when the river is dry there is no sense of us Mexicans paying one centavo to cross that bridge, because that bridge is built on Mexican territory," which was then (and still is) called the Chamizal.

M: At that time, Dr. Calleros, was it common for many other Mexicans to make the trip, such as your family had made, to emigrate to the United States?

C: Well, at that time, or rather, from that time, I learned that from about 1883 or 1884 Mexicans started to come to the U.S. for the purpose of going on the reenganches. Reenganches were agencies which hired Mexicans to work for the railroads, especially the Santa Fe, the Southern Pacific, and the G.H. and S.A. At that time, there were, on El Paso and 7th Streets, three reenganche agencies especially for the hiring and recruiting of Mexicans who wanted to go to work for the railroads. The three companies were Sárate and Anvina, the Handlin Supply Company, (Handlin provided laborers to the Santa Fe railraod), and the Holmes Supply Company, the third one, which supplied laborers to the Southern Pacific. Now, these laborers were hired for \$1 per day! Then there was a commissary by the name of Treble Supply Company. They furnished the provisions and the groceries that were sent along with the track layers. Most of them went to Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Sacramento on the West Coast, and Topeka, Kansas

and Chicago down on the Santa Fe where the distribution was made, and then on to the Santa Fe that went to Amarillo, Texas, and Galveston and Houston.

M: Was this movement of workers from México very extensive?

C: Well, up to and including 1912 when I went to work for the Santa Fe, it was still what we would call nowadays "heavy traffic." Usually every day from El Paso were shipped four or five passenger coaches with laborers to the Southern Pacific, the Santa Fe and other railroads. Of course, the Santa Fe also furnished the Rock Island and the Southern Pacific, and they furnished the Union Pacific and all those lines on the West. So approximately there were 90 laborers to each coach. So you multiply 90 x 5 and you have about 450 per day. Of course the reason for that was that the Irish who did all of the track work up to and including 1882 when your railroad came to El Paso, they just quit doing that and went into some other kind of business; so then it was the Mexicans who took over.

Now the Southern Pacific used Chinese track men. When the Southern Pacific reached El Paso in May, 1882, they brought in 3000 Chinese track laborers, and when the railroad was completed at El Paso and was joined with the G.S. and S.A. coming from San Antonio to El Paso, then all the Chinese were discharged. That's why we had so many Chinese restaurants and laundries in El Paso, oh, for about 20 years, because those Chinese had to find jobs, because the railroads didn't take care of them. And then the Mexicans took over their jobs.

M: Did the families of the workers remain in México?

C: The families all remained in México. There were no track laborers sent with their families. There were a few exceptions. After a worker had worked six months or a year, then he was permitted to bring his family, and They were given transportation from El Paso to the section wherever the husband

was working. But ordinarily all those workers that worked for the railroad, they were given passes to visit their families every six months if they wanted to, and they all took advantage of that. They went to México and stayed there three or four weeks and then came back. Of course they were always welcomed, especially experienced track workers. And then after 1912 those families that went along with their husbands were given old boxcars, which were converted as living quarters. They were called bunk houses, and the railroad usually had them in isolated whistle stops. They had anywhere from 10 to 20 box cars used by 10 or 20 families. One family was given a box car.

M: So then you had communities which developed or started as a result of laborers coming over here from México?

C: Oh yes, like Vado, New Mexico, Mesquite, Bonana, Rincón. All those present towns, they were started by bunk houses; and the same thing applies to the route going to the West Coast to Deming and on to Douglas and on to Los Angeles.

M: What kind of conditions existed in these railroad communities?

C: The people were perfectly happy because they had the commissary. It came once a week on the local freight trains and left provisions, and the laborers always had their money or their families to pay for it. And those who didn't have a family, they hired some woman from around the little community there. She used to cook for 10, 20 or 30 cents; the meals were 25 cents per meal.

M: What about schools for children, and recreational and social facilities?

C: There was no such thing as a school per se, or recreational facilities. Of course a kid, he doesn't need much of a recreation field to entertain himself, because all that it took was just to clean a little brush from

around the bunk houses and the place looked very respectable. And you know Mexicans--they always have flowers, so they got their flower pots and the first thing you know they had a garden. If it was in the summertime they had their vegetable garden.

M: Did the railroad companies treat the workers well then, and provide for their needs?

C: Excellent. Especially medical. You know the Santa Fe, they had the plan of every worker for the Santa Fe, and the Southern Pacific and all the railroads. They paid 50 cents per month and that entitled them to doctor, medicine and hospital.

M: Did Mexican workers have opportunities to get into the higher paying jobs?

C: Very seldom. Now that's where the trouble came in, that a Mexican was not given an opportunity until way, way many years to be a straw boss. A straw boss would be the equivalent of assistant to the roadmaster or assistant to the section foreman, and he would get 25 cents extra for being the straw boss.

M: So then Mexican workers would seldom be crew bosses or hold some of the positions of administration?

C: Well, the highest they would ever get would be the boss of the hand car, because hand cars would be operated every eight miles. Every eight miles there is a man who takes care of that trackage and another man takes over the next eight miles. From section to section he is held responsible for keeping the road in shape and seeing if there is any breakage or damage.

M: What were the wage differences between what was paid to Mexican workers and what was paid to Anglo workers?

C: There were no such things as Anglo workers, because no Anglo would go to work for \$1.00 per day. It was a 100% Mexican deal.

M: What about the skilled jobs?

C: Well, of course you mean, like mechanics, where they would be in the mechanical department? Those were skilled jobs. In the offices, of which there were very few, there were very, very few Mexicans. Now for instance I started with the Santa Fe Railroad as a messenger boy. I worked seven days a week, from 7 A.M. to 8 P.M. every day. No coffee break, no vacation, no time and a half. None of that nonsense. And I got paid \$30 a month, which was darn good pay. Thirty dollars in 1912 was very, very good money. Then from there I went to assistant yard clerk which paid \$55, then to yard clerk which paid \$60. Then I went in as cart clerk. See, in the meantime I was accumulating seniority. So when a vacancy came up it was open for bid. So then I became cart clerk. Then I became a rate clerk, then a chief clerk, then a chief line clerk. So you see, I was along with two other boys, Isabel García whom I took in, and Manuel García, who took me in when he was promoted to warehouse foreman. Manuel took me to work for the Santa Fe. So there were three of us who went to Sacred Heart School, and from there when we graduated went over to the Santa Fe.

M: At what age did you start working for the railroad?

C: I was seventeen years old when I started.

M: Would you say that the Mexican workers felt good and were satisfied with their connection with the railroad?

C: Well, the three of us were, because we were qualified. We had graduated from the eighth grade at Sacred Heart School. We had already finished algebra, commercial arithmetic, commercial law, physiology and physical geography. And those are subjects that are now taught in high school. And of course the three of us were ambitious enough not to bother with this nonsense of intolerance, because we fought our battles. Now don't think that it was a bed of roses. I remember that when I first got to be assistant

cashier, the first ones that jumped on me were the Masons, and then the Ku Klux Klan. They couldn't see why a Mexican was there, see?

M: What did they try to do?

C: To get me to quit. Or get the railroad to fire me.

M: What did they do specifically?

C: Oh, they used to call me "dirty Mexican." At that time they called us Mexicans "yellow bellies," and then "greasers." And they would do everything to see that something went wrong, in order to blame us for doing it, in a very snitchy way.

M: Would you say that it was unusual for you and those other two friends that you had to rise to those kinds of positions?

C: Oh, yes, because in the other railroads they didn't have any Mexicans. In the G.H. and S.A., the Southern Pacific, the El Paso Southwestern and the Rock Island, they didn't have any Mexicans. We were the only Mexicans in town. And when the three of us left the railroad... Manuel García retired and Isabel García died, and then I left the service in 1926 to go into social welfare work. When the three of us left, that was it. There were no more Mexicans hired at the Santa Fe. And to this day there hasn't been a Mexican cashier or a Mexican chief clerk.

M: What happened? Why didn't more Mexicans do the same things that you and your friends had done to move up?

C: Well, you yourself, being a Mexican, know that the average Mexican doesn't have that fighting spirit to fight for something that is his. "Sí, señor, lo que usted diga". "Yes sir, whatever you say."

M: Why did you have the fighting spirit and the other Mexicans didn't?

C: I don't know. I suppose we were brought up with that.

M: Do you think it was part of the influence of your family, your father, perhaps?

C: Oh, yes, my grandfather especially, because my grandfather and great grandfather used to be in the transportation business with those covered wagons from Durango to Santa Fe, New Mexico. That started in the 1700's. It took three months to make the trip and then three months back. Now, that's hard work and hard traveling, and hard to get along, so probably the question of surviving, especially when I was a youngster... It used to make me mad even to think how we were expelled from México. The injustice that was done to my father!

M: Would you say that your father instilled pride and confidence in yourself?

C: Absolutely.

M: What about your family on your mother's side?

C: On my mother's side, my grandfather, he was a candy maker and a baker. He had a candy shop and a bakery, and believe it or not, at the age of four or five I was helping him to make dough and Mexican sweet bread. And so I acquired some of that commercial thing. Now personally I am a full-blooded Mexican Indian. Three of my grandparents were of the Tepehuanis, and my grandmother on my father's side, she was a Tarahumara. So I am a full-blooded Indian.

M: What kind of education did your parents have?

C: My father never got beyond the fourth grade, and my mother finished the sixth grade. Of course, sixth grade in México is the equivalent of eighth grade here. Also, my relatives, my cousins and my aunts, were school teachers in the little town of Río Florido. Vicenta Grajera, one of my cousins who is about 80 years old, still teaches the sixth grade in Río Florido. She has taught there for over 60 years and has a brilliant mind. I have several

cousins who came here after us, and the girls joined... One was a Sister of the Incarnate Word. Another was a Sister of the Mother Cabrini in New York. The one with the Incarnate Word over here in San Antonio used to teach all this flower making and arts and crafts. I have many cousins who are doctors and lawyers, and they all come from that little town.

M: You come from quite a hardworking family.

C: Yes, that's right.

M: Let me ask you some questions about El Paso and Juárez in those early days of your life. What kind of a place was this area, both cities, physically?

C: Well, both cities, basically, they were towns of the era. There were no restrictions as to crossing the bridge, or passports or anything like that. Everyone was happy, coming and going without any customs restrictions, any immigration restrictions, any health department restrictions. We were a happy lot. Of course Juárez has always been the larger of the two cities, like it is now. El Paso has around 350,000 inhabitants, while Juárez has 420,000. When we came here in 1902 El Paso had about 9,000 and Juárez had about 12,000, so it was a happy family.

M: There was free movement then, back and forth? Does that mean, then, that people from Juárez could cross over and move to other parts of the United States without anyone stopping them?

C: Oh, absolutely. All you had to do coming from México, if you were a Mexican citizen, was to report at the immigration office on the American side--give your name, the place of your birth, and where you were going to. That's all you needed. It was the same thing with Americans going to México. All they had to do was stop at the Mexican immigration office and register that they were going into México. They had to state their business--tourist, visitor, businessman or immigrant.

M: Mexicans could come to El Paso without becoming U.S. citizens or going through any other process, simply by stating at the immigration that they intended to become residents of El Paso?

C: Yes, that's all.

M: How large would you estimate that the movement of Mexicans coming into this country and going through that process was during those years?

C: To live in El Paso, most of them; but to go on, very few. Very few went as far as Santa Fe, New Mexico, or to Deming, New Mexico. There was no reason to do that, unless you were gonna work on a railroad or on a farm or on a ranch. Cattlemen were looking for Mexican vaqueros, because a cowboy is not an American institution. Vaqueros taught the cowboys how to ride a horse. There were no horses north of the Río Grande. The first horses were brought over here by the Mexicans to the U.S.

M: What about the workers who worked for the railroad who were taken to work in distant places in the U.S.? Did many of them stay in these other places or did most of them return?

C: No. Up to about 1920 very few stayed permanently, because most of those families had their homes in México. The only advantage of coming to the U.S. was to earn what they thought would be a little bit more money. But one peso in México at that time was worth more than one dollar over here on this side. Prior to 1848 a Mexican peso was worth two American dollars. Now it's reversed.

M: Did the towns have a lot of buildings? Were there a lot of homes in this area, or were they small places?

C: Well, they were small and large. It all depended on the size of the family that you had. Of course here in El Paso around the 1890's they spoiled

the south part of town by building those presidios, those tenement houses, and those were built not by Mexicans but by Americans, Jews and Syrians for the purpose of renting two rooms... At that time you could rent two rooms for \$3 per month. And some of those are still in existence. The only improvement they have ever made is to raise the rent from \$3 to \$25.50 or \$30 for two rooms.

M: What kind of a place was this to live? Were Mexican people happy living here?

C: Certainly they were. Yes, and those that didn't like it, they just moved to Juárez.

M: How did the life of Mexicans compare with the life of the Anglo-Americans?

C: We didn't mix with them.

M: Why not?

C: What for? We couldn't learn anything from them.

M: Did they want to mix with you?

C: No, they wouldn't.

M: So it was a mutual feeling to stay apart.

C: It existed about until only a few years ago.

M: Was there any discrimination?

C: Lots of it. There has always been discrimination and intolerance and bigotry.

M: What forms did it take in those early years?

C: Well, there were few Mexicans who made high school. But what was the use of a Mexican going to high school when he couldn't get a decent job? After they started having the department stores, like Kress and Woolworth... Take a Mexican girl who graduated from high school. Well, she went to work for Kress for \$15 a week, and she could speak English and Spanish and wait on customers in two languages. Then you have on the same counter an Anglo girl, who graduated from high school. Now she would be placed in charge

of that Mexican girl at that counter, and her pay would be \$20 or \$25 per week. And she could not wait on Mexican customers because she didn't know Spanish. We have Americans who were born here in El Paso of all ages, who never bothered to learn Spanish. I can name you a dozen attorneys, born in El Paso, who went to school in El Paso, and they don't even speak a word of Spanish.

M: So department stores started doing this from the very beginning?

C: Yes, and it ended when Kennedy put in the Civil Rights. And they hated to do it. And they still hate to do it. There were no Mexican men or women, boys or girls, working in the banks. None in the Electric Company, the Gas Company, the Water Company. American offices, like insurance offices, they never hired Mexicans.

M: When did those kinds of companies start moving into the area?

C: Oh, they've been here since the '20's.

M: What kind of education did you receive in your early years and later on, after grammar school?

C: None. I went to Sacred Heart, under the Sisters of Loretto. Best education there is. I didn't take subjects. I was taught.

M: What do you mean when you say "none"? /Above/

C: My education, I got it at home and in church. We Mexicans, we make a distinction between education and instruction. We do not believe that we go to school to be educated. We go to school to be instructed. But going to a Catholic Parochial school, in addition to being instructed, you are educated morally, which means a lot.

M: The instruction that you received at Sacred Heart, was it good in your estimation?

C: Absolutely it was good. It's what taught me what I am. You might wonder why I didn't go to high school. Well, it's because I inquired what they

taught in high school, and they were teaching in the first and second years in high school what I had already learned at Sacred Heart in the eighth grade.

M: What about other Mexican children going to school? Did they go mostly to the public schools?

C: Sacred Heart cost 50 cents per month. I worked at numerous jobs. I had to go to work at the age of eight to support my mother and my other brother and sister.

M: Was Sacred Heart a big school educating large numbers of Mexicans?

C: Oh yes, they taught from the first grade to the eighth grade.

M: About how big was the school then?

C: Well, they had eight rooms times 50...about 400 children. And when I went into the first grade there were about 60 of us, and we managed.

M: Were there any Anglos in the school?

C: No. There was one Negro boy; he is now a doctor in Chicago. There was one Syrian girl. All the rest were Mexicans from El Paso and Juárez.

M: What about the teachers? Were they Anglos?

C: There were eight Anglos and two New Mexico Mexicans, and they were good.

M: Did they teach anything about Mexican heritage in the school?

C: Why, certainly. We learned English and Spanish at the same time. This is what current educators are just beginning to appreciate the value of. Now they have bilingual education, first to fourth grades, in the public schools.

M: Did they teach you Mexican history at Sacred Heart?

C: Sure. They taught American and Mexican history. I remember in the seventh grade I took all the history books and threw them out the window because I didn't believe that they were teaching me. I used to go home and tell my

grandfather and father, "Look what they are teaching me about the Alamo and San Jacinto and Texas independence." You know what my grandfather told me? "You learn everything that the gringos teach you, but don't believe half of it."

M: Were these books that you didn't like used at Sacred Heart?

C: Why, yes, because being in the U.S., you have to teach what the U.S. wants you to teach. But there was a great difference, you see, because our teachers could supplement what was in the books with their own knowledge, which was more accurate. Our history teacher was a history teacher.

M: What would you say then was the philosophy of teaching at Sacred Heart, and how did it differ from the philosophy of the public schools?

C: Well, there was a great difference, just like the Baptists, the Jewish and other religions. They have their own schools, because they don't believe in the public school system. Which I don't.

M: What about after the eighth grade? How did you acquire the rest of your education?

C: The public library--histories, biographies. I have never read a novel in my life, because I was told that they were fictitious and that I would never learn anything from a novel. I was given a subscription to the National Geographic by Dr. Paul Gallagher when I graduated from school. (I was the valedictorian.) He told me that everything I would need to hold a job I could learn in those magazines. I later acquired a collection composed of every issue published, and I have them bound. The National Geographic offered me \$85,000 for them, but I turned them down and donated them, along with my entire collection of books, to the city of El Paso.

M: How did you find the time, if you were busy working to support your family, to pursue your own education?

C: I found time because I knew that I wanted to make something of myself and I worked at it. I didn't go riding or hunting or to dances or fishing, etc. I was busy.

M: Your spare time was spent reading?

C: And working,

M: What other kind of work did you do?

C: Well, I worked for the Santa Fe from 1912-1926. I was interested in scouting; I had my own scout troop. I loved social welfare work. I worked for the National Catholic Welfare Conference in the Department of Immigration and Naturalization.

M: When was that?

C: July, 1926. I was asked to go to Washington, and then I was to spend three months in New York, two months in Philadelphia, and two more months in Chicago learning the work. I said, "No, I don't want to learn anything. I know it all." So I came right back and went to work. I was in charge of the border here, from Brownsville, Texas, to San Ysidro, California.

M: What was the nature of your duties in that position?

C: Immigration law, working for the Church to represent aliens of every creed, color and national origin, without distinction, free of charge, to help them with their troubles with immigration officials, on both the Mexican and American sides.

M: Were there a lot of troubles that these immigrants were having?

C: Oh, yes, because when the immigration law went into effect, well, then the trouble started. The immigration act went into being in the early 1920's. Then came the head tax. Every alien had to pay a head tax of \$8 to be immigrated. And then came the consular visas in addition to the head tax. Of course, I was qualified for that through my job of handling the labor

that was brought out of México every day, because my job was to issue the passes of the track laborers that left every day over the Santa Fe. So I had an opportunity to talk to humans, and we were always on the look-out to see that we didn't have any undesirables, which we had very very few of.

M: Would you say that there was exploitation on the part of companies that employed these immigrants?

C: Yes; there still is. Especially in this bracero movement in California. Especially by the commissaries, selling groceries at excessive rates. I found a commissary man in Newton, Kansas, once, selling a sack of flour for a dollar, and here we buy it for 40 cents.

M: What were the conditions of the Mexican population in El Paso at that time in terms of housing, health and social services?

C: No problems. The Health Department only functioned when quarantines were put up. In 1904 or 1905 we had a diptheria epidemic in El Paso and all Mexicans living in El Paso were sent to Juárez, regardless of citizenship. My brother Martín died here in El Paso of diptheria, on a Monday, then Rita died on Wednesday; then my mother and myself, we were deported to Juárez. By that time I had another sister, Soledad, who was born in El Paso. She died on Friday of that same week and I was the only one of the family left. So after the diptheria was over, then we came back.

M: Where did you go in El Paso?

C: Oh, we rented a room.

M: Did Juárez have the problem too?

C: No, there was not a single diptheria case originating in Juárez. So I have the distinction of having been deported twice.

M: When they deported you, how did they do it?

C: Just packed you up, put you in a wagon; and when a wagon was loaded they took you across the river.

M: Did they give you money?

C: No, nothing.

M: Did you leave any property behind?

C: Just two little rooms in those tenements. We just locked it up and came back to it later. Of course we didn't have the problem then of thieves and burglars and some of the modern things created by civilization.

M: How long did you stay in Juárez?

C: About two weeks.

M: How many were deported, like yourself?

C: About 300 families. They just cleaned up South El Paso.

M: Was this problem mainly concentrated in South El Paso?

C: Oh, no, it was all over town. The Anglos had it too. Just like when they had the Spanish flu during 1918-1919. Everybody had it.

M: How was the housing condition in El Paso at that time?

C: Well, we had our tenements. We had our hovels. The first piece of property I bought (it is still standing) was a little adobe hut with a dirt floor, and I paid \$500 for it. Five dollars a month on that, and I paid five dollars a month on this watch that I had (and I still have it) and five dollars for my bicycle. I invested \$15 and I had \$15 to give home, because I made \$30.

M: Do you recall the visit by President Díaz and President Taft in 1909?

C: Yes, sir. I was just as near to him as I am to you now.

M: How did El Paso react to that visit?

C: Just like when the President comes to a town. Everyone wants to see him, see what the hell he looks like. No particular reason. There was no significance to the meeting because it was a diplomatic meeting. Taft requested the meeting. He just wanted to shake the hand of Porfirio Díaz. And Porfirio Díaz was a great man.

M: Did the city of El Paso do anything to make the city more attractive?

C: No, just put up the flags and bunting.

M: I read an article in a magazine that told about a project of putting a fence around the tenements so that the Presidents would not see them and El Paso would not be embarrassed.

C: That's a lie. The only thing that happened during their visit was that the Chamizal zone was declared a neutral zone. And there were no flags, either American or Mexican, permitted. There were no photographs permitted in the Chamizal. I have the protocol, in English and Spanish, as to how they should act every minute they were in town. They were not to discuss the Chamizal; and to assure that, when Díaz gave the banquet /for/ Taft in Juárez, they put Díaz at one end of the table and Taft at the other.

M: Was there poverty in El Paso and Juárez at that time?

C: There is poverty in all the world, and there is lots of poverty and misery in the U.S.A.

M: How was it here at that time?

C: We didn't feel it much because with \$1 a day we could live very nicely.

M: Did most people make \$1 a day?

C: Why, sure. All the big industries like the smelter, the cement plant, they paid \$1 per day. My father made \$1 for about 10 years.

M: What about in Juárez, working for Mexican wages? How much did juarenses make?

C: They could make a peso a day and live like kings, because things were cheaper in Juárez.

M: So you would say that the standard of living in Juárez was similar to El Paso?

C: Yes. Of course there are poor people. And poor people have to live in poor homes. But there wasn't anybody starving, and fortunately we didn't have any of these government handouts, and we didn't have any stamps and we

didn't have any busybodies. We didn't have any waste of money like you people in California have.

M: I'd like to ask you questions regarding the revolutionary period after 1910. A lot of refugees came to this area because of political problems in Chihuahua.

C: Not only in Chihuahua but all over México--Monterrey, Saltillo, Guanajuato. I was at the railroad and I used to meet the train every day.

M: They used to come every day?

C: Well, not every day, but very frequently right after the Revolution in 1910. And we had another problem in 1916. Some more people came from México. And we had the religious persecutions in México for about ten years, when prominent Catholics were expelled out of México, and we took care of them.

M: How large was this movement of refugees from persecution?

C: Religious?

M: Religious, political...

C: Now don't mix them up, they were different.

M: Okay. Let's take the political first.

C: Of course, anyone who was strictly a porfirista, well, he was thrown out of there, either shot or expelled. And some of them left without giving the authorities the opportunity to arrest them. Many cattlemen, ranchers, businessmen, educators had to flee the country. Then, during the Revolution they had to face another group to keep away from. And when the religious question came up, when they closed all the churches in México, well, we took care of all the priests and bishops and nuns that were expelled.

M: Was El Paso pretty receptive to these refugees?

C: Oh, yes.

M: Where did they live?

C: They lived wherever they could. I remember one time I lived down on K Street. I had 27 nuns in my home for two weeks. They slept on the rug.

M: Did Anglos open up their homes to some of these refugees--like the political refugees?

C: Very few.

M: How did Anglos react to this situation?

C: Very little. They were not interested.

M: What about wealthy families from México, like the Terrazas family, who came here at that time?

C: They didn't need any money.

M: They brought it with them?

C: Well, they had some of it here in the banks. That's what Americans do. They send all their money to Switzerland.

M: What kind of background did the political refugees have?

C: In México, all Mexicans are educated at home. A Mexican treats everybody with respect. A Mexican may not know how to read and write, but he is educated as to manners and culture.

M: Did many of the refugees have formal instruction in school? Did they come from the middle and upper classes in Chihuahua? Is that why there were persecuted?

C: We had all kinds of refugees: teachers, engineers, miners, constructors, cowpunchers, architects--you name it. Everyone came. We had many skilled persons, although, of course, the majority were unskilled. Those non-skilled, they had their little farms.

M: Getting back to the refugees, what happened to them eventually?

C: Most of them went back to México.

M: Did any of them stay?

- C: Very few. And those that stayed, probably they already had their own businesses set up. One family has a funeral home here. A daughter in the family is a C.P.A. and has a job with the I.R.S. Of course, Mexicans are good in mathematics, generally.
- M: What about the refugees who lived in Juárez?
- C: They came to El Paso, and when things were over, they went back.
- M: And what happened to their property while they were gone?
- C: There were caretakers. Of course, there were a few confiscations, legal and illegal.
- M: What about all the people who, because of the trouble of the Revolution, couldn't make a living and had to migrate to the border and try to immigrate to the United States?
- C: Everybody made a living, there was no problem with that. The only time a Mexican didn't make a living was during the Depression.
- M: Well, for example, in 1916-1917 there was a very bad period in México because of food shortages, and literally there was starvation in some places.
- C: No, don't say "starvation" in México.
- M: I've read documents relating to this.
- C: You've read it in some gringo-oriented imaginings. But not starvation, this is not so. There was misery, but not to get bloated and starve, not like in Africa.
- M: Some of the reports indicated that because of lack of food there were people starving to death in several places.
- C: There may have been people dying of diptheria or diahrrea or other diseases brought on by malnutrition, but not starvation per se; that has never happened.
- M: I'd like to ask you about World War I. I am wondering about the effect of the War on the Mexican population. Were many Mexicans drafted?

- C: Yes, sir, many; all those who were eligible to be drafted. And they served with distinction. We have several with the Congressional Medal, and they served in all wars.
- M: Did they draft people who were non-citizens, and as non-citizens were they supposed to be drafted?
- C: Yes, there were many. I lied my way to get into the Army, because I was not of age and I was a non-citizen. But what I wanted to do was go to the Archives of the Indies, in Sevilla, because you do not learn the real American history in México or the U.S. You have to go to the University of Salamanca. There is where you learn the American history.
- M: Were there young Mexicans who went back to México because they didn't want to be drafted?
- C: Very few. I can safely say that there were not 20 draft evaders from the city of El Paso.
- M: Now, in the military, what kind of jobs did Mexicans have?
- C: Well, there were many that got up to staff sergeants. There were several officers. Of course in the Army, if you prove your ability, in spite of the Sojourners' Club... They are the bastards in the Armed Forces of the United States.
- M: Were most Mexicans concentrated in the infantry?
- C: Wherever they were assigned. Several were in the Air Force, Signal Corps, Corpmaster-- whatever they were qualified for.
- M: Was it difficult for people to acquire immigration papers after the Immigration Department had established their offices and began to control the movement of people?
- C: Well, it's just like every law that is immoral. The immigration law is immoral.
- M: Were there a lot of persons coming in illegally?

C: The illegal immigration is brought about entirely by the desire of the Anglo to bring them over and hire them to pay them less. Just like marijuana. Americans make the marijuana trade profitable. And there is more marijuana raised in Wisconsin and in Michigan than is raised in all Chihuahua. But the price is higher over there because the cost of harvesting is higher. And the demand and use is mostly by Anglos.

M: I'd like to ask you questions about the Depression. What happened here during the Depression?

C: What happened in El Paso during the Depression will be out very soon in a book which I am writing, and it is entitled Get Rid of the Mexicans. That was between 1929 and 1939. It is going to be revealing but it is going to be documented, because I have every document. Because I was mixed up right in it. I called the attention of the federal government through the immigration service and they claimed they had nothing to do with it the deportations. But they did, because in the United States government, whether it be federal, state or local, it is all underhanded work, and I mean that. They denied the fact that they had anything to do with it, that it was up to the states and the welfare agencies to get rid of them. It was up to the employer to get rid of the Mexican, to fire him, and it was up to the employer not to hire any more Mexicans. A Depression, when it comes in any country, the ones who suffer are supposed to be aliens. And very few Americans knew the difference between being a citizen and being a Mexican national. They look at them and say, "Oh, you are a Mexican." The average American does not believe in the Constitutional Rights for others. As a matter of fact, he doesn't even know what the Constitution says. So the thing was nationally--from El Paso to Vermont and from the Carolinas to California--to get rid of the Mexicans, just like that. And

within six months over 400,000 individuals of different ages had been sent to México. All they had to do was to report at the railroad station, and a ticket would be given to them to the border. And then the Mexican government, which has as much sense as the American government, would say, "Come on, compatriots. Let's form a country." But where do they take them to? They had no place to take them, they had no homes. They didn't have any relatives there. So they all started coming back, and I got them back.

M: How did you do that?

C: Well, they were American citizens. You can't keep an American citizen from coming back to his country, regardless of how he looks or who he is, if he is an American citizen.

C: Did you have any trouble doing that?

M: No. I had trouble convincing some of the governmental agencies that they didn't know what the Constitution was, especially American consuls and chiefs of immigration. I'll give you an example: I had an American consul call me one day, from Juárez. He says, "I have a family here. Big problem, no money; just walked all the way from Chihuahua here." "All right, send them over to the bridge. I'll talk to them." I met a man, his wife, and eleven children. The man went to México in the early part of the 1930's as a six month old baby. He was born in San Angelo, Texas. His wife was a Californian, born in Visalia. She was nine months old when she went to México. They were both on the same train going south. They landed in Zacatecas, and both families settled there. They lived in the same neighborhood, grew up, got married. They had eleven children. They couldn't make a go of it. This man couldn't get a job in Zacatecas, and most of the people, that's where they went, from Zacatecas, Chihuahua, to nearby border places. So one day in desperation he started coming back north.

He had all his papers, his children, his marriage certificate. He didn't have a birth certificate, nor did his wife. So I wired immediately and I got their birth certificates. So I called the consul and said, "This man doesn't need a visa, he doesn't need a permit. He doesn't need anything." "Well, how about the children? They need \$200 apiece for the children. They are Mexican. They were born in Zacatecas." Well, he interpreted the law that they needed visas because they were born in México. I said, "Well, never mind. I want to bring them over and I'll have them in El Paso." So I brought them to the bridge and took them into the immigration office, and the same thing came up. The immigration wouldn't let the children over, so I took the man out and showed him the railroad bridge, and told him to walk his family across the railroad bridge and I would meet them on the other side. And I met them. There were three immigrant inspectors there, arresting them, and I said, "You don't dare arrest those! They are citizens of the United States, all thirteen of them. You damn fools, you got rid of two that you thought were Mexicans. Now you're getting thirteen American citizens."

M: So what happened?

C: Well, I took them over to the Travelers' Aid. I said, "You have thirteen citizens here, one came from California, one came from Texas." They said, "What are we going to do with them?" "I don't care what you do with them. It's up to you to feed and house and take care of them, but don't let them starve to death."

M: Do you know what became of them?

C: Yes, they went up to Iowa. The man is happy there. Works for a nursery.

One day the consul called and said, "I have a young lady and her sister here. They walked all the way from Guanajuato. What shall I do?" So I

said, "Send them over, I will meet them at the bridge." This nice looking girl, she was all ragged and dirty. She spoke perfect English.

"What happened?" "Oh, my parents took us to Guanajuato. But we didn't like it there so we ran away from home." "Where did you go to school?" "Well, I just got my Master's Degree from The University of Kansas." "What about your sister?" "Well, she is a senior at Topeka High School." "You got any papers?" "No, we just came." So I told the immigration people: "Now, these two girls are American citizens. They have no proof, but their word is just as good as yours. Now they can prove by their English, and by the way they speak, that they were both born in Topeka, Kansas, and you cannot keep them away from coming into the country." So I brought them over, took them to the Travelers' Aid, sent them over to Topeka. I could repeat hundreds of cases like that. The injustice of the interpretation of the law to Mexicans!

M: Do you have more cases like this written down in your reports?

C: Yes. I have a million and three quarter family cases in the vaults. Those are the things, my friend, that make life so miserable. If I were to tell you some of the experiences I've gone through!

M: One thing that I am curious about is the use of the word "Chicano." "Chicano" is being used quite a bit now by Mexican people. What about in those early days of the 20th Century here in El Paso -- was "Chicano" used then?

C: No, it's only been eight or nine years that the word has been used. Do you know the origin of the word?

M: I have heard a few theories.

C: Well, I'll tell you the facts. It comes from a French word, "chican," which means "pig." The Irish picked it up against the English, and to this day

they are still fighting about it. Because the Irish called the English "chicans," which means dirty pigs. The Poles used that against the Germans when they started persecuting them because of their religion. They called them _____ and they still call them that. Now in Spanish we do have a word "chicanada," and in English it is "chicanery." They both mean when you do a dirty deed to another human, and that's "chicanery," or "chicanada." But these darn fools up in Denver... And the persecutions were horrible in Denver. I have been fighting for years for them, and now, well, here they come up with the word "Chicano." Well, now "Chicano" is very offensive, just like calling a gringo "white trash."

M: Well, but how do you know that "Chicano" comes from "chican?" There is a theory that "Chicano" comes from mexicano, pronounced meshicano...

C: No, no es cierto. You cannot prove that. Because I have the Florentine Codex and it doesn't say that. I have a copy of the original in Nahuatl. There is no such word in there. You look up "chican" in the dictionary, the Century Dictionary; it is much better than Webster's.

M: Yes, I've looked in the dictionary. And of course, they are very derogatory. But the question is, was "Chicano" derived from these derogatory words?

C: Yes, from there.

M: How do you know it was from there?

C: How do I know? Listen, every decade has its own interpretation. When I came to these United States in 1900, Mexicans... You know what they were called? "Yellow bellies." In the 1920's they were "greasers," "mantecos." In the '30's they were "tiriles." In the '40's they were "tirilongos." In the '50's they were "zoot-suiters," and then came the "pochos" and finally came the "Chicanos." Now ten years from now there will be something else. Then these damn fools that don't know any better, they'll accept anything.

Just like they accepted the damn beards that they have, bigotes y pendejadas. You ask them: "Why do you do that?" And they say, "I'm imitating Jesus Christ." That's the first excuse they give you.

M: Ernesto Galarza, in his book Barrio Boy has reference to the word "Chicano." He says that when he was growing up in Sacramento, California, that "Chicano" was used in the 1910's.

C: Oh, no, not that early.

M: Could it be possible that it was used in other places of the U.S.?

C: I have been all over the U.S. since 1912 to date. I've done a lot of travelling through the railroad, and I've done a lot of travelling through social welfare, and I never heard the word "Chicano" till I heard it in Longmont, Colorado.

M: Just a few years ago?

C: About eight years ago. I called a meeting of the Mexicans there at Boulder when they were going to demonstrate. At the meeting I was introduced by someone who said, "Ahora aquí sí tenemos a un verdadero Chicano." I said, "You might be a Chicano, I'm not. I'm a Mexican, and I'm proud of it. Sí, señor, a Chicano I'm not. En México no entienden por qué se dejan los mexicanos aquí arrastrarse así."

/The interview was to continue upon my return to El Paso in the Summer of 1973, but sadly, Dr. Calleros passed away in the Spring./

O.M.