

7-7-1975

## Interview no. 167

Ralph Murillo

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Ralph Murillo  
INTERVIEWER: Richard Estrada  
PROJECT: Bicentennial  
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

El Paso District Director of LULAC.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; educational experiences; Black and Chicano movements; Anglo/Mexican relations in El Paso; the G. I. Forum; Raza Unida Party; LULAC and its future.

1 hour.

33 pages.

## BICENTENNIAL

E: This interview is being conducted on July 7, 1975. The subject of the interview is Mr. Ralph Murillo of El Paso, Texas.

Mr. Murillo, where were you born?

M: Here in El Paso.

E: In what year, sir?

M: 1944.

E: Could you tell me something about your parents' background?

M: Well, my father is from México. He came, as a child, to the United States. My mother was born and raised in the Ysleta area.

E: Could you tell me what part of México your father was from?

M: From Zacatecas.

E: Do you recall in what year he emigrated from México?

M: Oh, he was very young. In his early childhood, three or four years old.

E: What did his father do?

M: His father died very, very early in life. His father had physical problems and did not survive long so my dad never really got to know his father at all.

E: What was the nature of your dad's business?

M: My dad was also physically handicapped. He is a cook by trade. He has been the chef at the Rodeway Enterprises approximately for twenty some years.

E: Do you come from a large or a small family?

- M: Oh, relatively small--four in the family.
- E: How many brothers and sisters?
- M: I have three sisters. I'm the only male in the whole outfit.
- E: Of what age are they?
- M: I'm the youngest. We're all separated by about three years.
- E: What occupations do they have?
- M: Well, let's see, two of them are housewives. The other one is an officer in a savings and loan here in the city.
- E: So you were raised here in El Paso. Is that right?
- M: Yes.
- E: Could you tell me something about your early school years, your formative years?
- M: Of course, my early school years are quite interesting because at that time, being physically handicapped, the city of El Paso did not allow the physically handicapped to attend public schools. So in essence I had no elementary school. I had one hour a week at home for about two years, till finally a group of parents got together, began the process of filing suit and the schools were then opened. So the very first class that I ever attended was freshman high school.
- E: In what year was that?
- M: This was in 1962. I was quite old. I was eighteen years old when I started school.
- E: Did the city officials ever give any reason for not allowing handicapped children in schools?
- M: Oh yes. Their reason was that physically handicapped children could be endangered by going to public schools. Of course, it

was a fact of life that if your parents were well-off there were no barriers whatsoever even if you were physically handicapped. It was basically the upper lower class and below that had the problems.

E: Could you tell me the exact nature of your handicap?

M: I was stricken with polio when I was three. I'm quadraplegic; I have polio in all four limbs.

E: But you can walk and you do get around?

M: Yes. I've been lucky in that respect. I'm able to move.

E: In recalling your years in school, and, of course, you started at a rather late age, do you remember any authority figures, say, principals or teachers, who may of had an influence on you, either positive or negative?

M: Well, I don't think they were authority figures. Basically I had to grow up very fast. I spent the early years of my life in hospitals, low income hospitals in the El Paso area, and, of course, I spent a lot of time with older men. I figure that this is the sort of thing that gave me a different attitude when I went to school. I was totally unprepared to go to school in the first place. It was sort of what I like to refer to as a "guinea pig project." They chose five students, and if the majority of these five were to fail, the whole thing was going to fail. So to me it was a challenge, not so much for me, but certainly for the future of other young people. So when I went in at the age of eighteen, I feel that I had a certain maturity that I was able to cope with, and I had certain goals

and determination already set up before me. So there were very few authority figures in my life in high school. There were friends: there was one particular man, a Baptist speech teacher. We became friends. He was very young at that time. I think he was about twenty-three years old. I was eighteen. We communicated well. If anybody influenced my life, it would probably be him; but it wasn't in any way authoritative, giving counsel or anything of that nature, just talk.

E: Where did you go to high school, Mr. Murillo?

M: Burges High School.

E: Could you tell me something about your experiences there?

M: My experiences were very good, totally disproving immediately all of the theories that the El Paso School System has always had towards people that have problems that don't necessarily tie in to the day-to-day activities of a student. There was a tremendous feeling that the students were not going to be able to adjust. The students adjusted very rapidly. Those who did not adjust were really the older instructors. It was not a strange thing to walk down the hall, trip and fall. The students would not overreact. They'd stop and they'd ask, "Are you OK?" and they'd get you up. But if you were to fall in front of an older teacher, she not only caused a commotion by screaming, but literally had a heart attack. But the experience there was that the students adjusted well. Another thing that was good that I remember was that Burges High School had been open only a small number of years. It opened in '69, '68, around there. And the students from the Delta area of the city of El Paso...a lot of Mexican

American kids were being permitted to go to Burges, and there was a very good mixture of minorities and non-minorities--a lot of military kids [also]. So competition was stiff, but the good mixture I think was the cause that a lot of Mexican American kids were doing well.

E: You said '68-'69. You meant '58-'59, didn't you?

M: Yes. That's what I meant--'58-'59. Yes.

E: While you were going to school, did you ever experience any discrimination because of your ethnic background?

M: Yes. I think it was very obvious, especially at Burges High School.

The discrimination was there. There were no efforts made by the teachers to bring in the Mexican American, Chicano oriented students to the front of the room. Of course, you know, everybody walks in and sits at the back of the room. All of the good Anglo kids sit at the front. To me a good instructor would have produced some type of mixture. There were those instructors that did, using the alphabet system. There was one particular woman, a very authoritative woman with certain students, that would reverse the system. She'd sit them up in the front and would devote more time to them. But all in all, I would say 85% of the professors...it was very obvious that their efforts were geared toward the Anglo; the way they responded to the questions, etc. Now, I think a lot of young kids at that point could see that I was lucky. I was older. I could see it. There was more discrimination even toward the Black than toward the Mexican American individual. It was there. It was obvious.

E: How was your English at this time?

- M: Well, my English as a freshman was poor. This was one of the reasons that I earlier stated that the influence of the speech teacher was one of value to me because he worked with me very, very hard. He would devote a lot of extra time to me in this area. During and after school we became friends. I improved my English as I went along.
- E: Most of the students with whom you went to school, who are of Mexican descent...How would you characterize their English?
- M: It was poor. It was basically poor. There was some influx of the Mexican American people into the Burges-Eastwood area at that time. Those students had attended the elementary schools in that area. Their English was good. It wasn't something you could brag about, but it was good--better enunciation, etc. Those who came from the elementary schools in the Delta area or South El Paso area, their English was just poor, and they struggled to get along, especially since Burges High School was at that time considered one of the best schools in the state of Texas. Curriculum was difficult and the teachers were tough.
- E: To what degree do you think this inability to master English hindered these kids?
- M: Well, I think that just the basic inability to express themselves in the classroom was the biggest problem. Most of the classes were large. Even if you have an interested teacher there, he certainly would much rather spend his time exchanging ideas and communicating with those that could do it easier than those who had difficulty in trying to express themselves, trying to make their feelings and ideas known. Most of the time it was very



obvious to me. You had a kid getting up saying something and the teacher saying, "Fine," and it was dropped. Of course, it got to the point where he wasn't going to say any more because they weren't listening to him. Now there were exceptions. There were some students that realized, "I may not be saying it right, but I'm going to keep insisting until they hear me." That type of student did well and eventually he learned to express himself, but I think the great majority did not. They gave up.

E: What year did you graduate from high school?

M: I graduated in 1966.

E: Did you immediately go to the University?

M: Yes. I went to the University from there.

E: In El Paso?

M: In El Paso, yes.

E: What was your major?

M: I majored in Public Administration. Of course, they don't have a Public Administration Department at UTEP. They have it under Political Science.

E: Did you go the full four years?

M: Yes, I went the four years. Yes.

E: Did you notice any particular improvement with regard to the relationship between teachers and the Mexican American students in the University?

M: During the four years, yes. When I first got there...I'll tell you an experience I had. There was a young man that went to Burges High School with me. His name was Daniel Ortega. However, Daniel Ortega came from really a non-Mexican American home. His

father spoke no Spanish. He was completely brought up in an Anglo atmosphere, environment. His mother was a German American. As I say, they spoke no Spanish--their culture was totally Anglo. However, Dan was dark complexioned. He had beautiful diction. He spoke English well. We went to the first summer session. We were writing papers for English class and I kept getting F+ and he kept getting F-. Finally after the third paper that I got an F+, I went up to the instructor and said, "What's the problem? You're telling me that it's not right, but what is it that's wrong?" "You know I can't really pick out the things that are wrong," she said. This is a direct quote. She said, "Spanish-speaking people don't do well in my class." Well, I got the message. I went down to the registrar and dropped the class immediately. To me it was something that I had experienced, I was able to cope with it and I said, "I'm not going to cut it there but I'm going to find someone else I can cut it with." To this other individual, Dan Ortega, who was no more of a Mexican than I am an Anglo, he was really hurt. He stuck it out and he flunked the class, never realizing really why. Those kind of problems existed at the University. There were those who struck me [as if] they were trying to do something about it. At that point in time they called me and they said, over the telephone from one of the deans' offices, someone had told them of the problem and they said, "You're not the only one and we're trying to get someone to do something about it, but we can't do something unless someone is willing to speak out." Being only a freshman and trying to

get my education and not trying to solve the problems of the world I chickened out. Now I regret doing it, but she's still there.

E: Would you care to name her?

M: Oh, I don't think it's worth it now because now she's an aged woman. She's not moving very far. She's still teaching freshman English so...

E: Do you suspect she's still having this deleterious effect on Mexican American students?

M: I don't know. I think that it depends how you comprehended the thing. I think a lot of the kids who I talked to afterward said, "She's just very difficult." To me she wasn't difficult at all. She was just going to pass certain people and not pass others. That's all there was to it.

E: What other classes did you take in which you may have had a like experience? Or did you have any others?

M: Yes, there were many, many other experiences. I think the most prominent were in your classes where you had your advanced scholars teaching them. I remember one theory class that I took in Political Science. One of the better professors at the University was very, very obvious that...what his attitudes were. Of course, being the stubborn individual I've always been, I fought him and I fought him hard. It was very funny because the grade given to me was a compromise. I wanted an A. He said, "You're only worth a C," yet my grades on my papers were good. They were B's and A's, but in the conversation he said, "I'll make you a deal. Don't ever take my class again and I'll give you the B,"

and I settled for it. But the funny thing about it was that I had a very good Anglo friend. He went to school and he became president of the University--student body president. We were close friends and what we did once was I wrote a paper and he wrote a paper. I turned in his paper under my name and he turned in mine. Of course, the style is always there and he got the A+ and I got an A-, you know, this kind of thing. And he would always get the A+. So it was obvious. And it went along like that; I'm sure there are still many cases there.

E: Is that professor still there?

M: He's still there.

E: Did any of your fellow students ever express the same opinions about those professors?

M: I think they did. Unfortunately a lot of it came out only when you got a bad grade. That's where it all seems to fall apart because they're saying, "Sour grapes. He got a bad grade, so he's complaining about it."

E: You feel sure in your own mind that it wasn't sour grapes in your cases?

M: Not in mine. Not when you go from an F+, switch classes, and you start making A's.

E: How is your Spanish, Mr. Murillo?

M: It's... I can communicate in Spanish.

E: Did you ever take any Spanish courses at the University?

M: Yes, I took Spanish in high school ; I took two courses, the necessary foreign language, at the University, and that's all.

E: Were there many Mexican Americans in these Spanish classes with you?

- M: Oh, yes. The University didn't really permit you, if you were a native speaker, to take Spanish class with other students. In other words, it was strictly native speakers.
- E: How did they do? How did Mexican Americans for the most part do?
- M: In terms of speaking and reading, very well. In terms of the grammar, very poorly.
- E: Is that true of yourself?
- M: Oh yes. I never... I was never interested in it. My interest in Spanish was taking a class and getting through with it. I knew I could get an easy high grade there, which was the case, and left it at that.
- E: Could you repeat for me the years in which you went to school at U. T. El Paso?
- M: 1966 through '70.
- E: What did you do when you got out of college?
- M: Well, I worked through college. I worked with Jerry Wolfe Enterprises. Then at the end of my freshman year, I got a real good break. I had a class with a young man that I used to ride to class with. He'd pick me up and I'd pick him up, etc.; we'd take turns. He had a small janitorial firm. All he had were two office buildings, architects, up in the Mesa Street area. He was a senior and I was a freshman and he was going away to get his law degree. He said, "Why don't you just take these two janitorial jobs? They're easy." So I did and I grew a little. I ran my own janitorial firm up until the time I joined the Small Business Administration. I also worked in the evenings for Jerry Wolfe Enterprises.

E: When did you join the SBA?

M: In 1970, right after college. I applied and here I am.

E: Did you join about the same time that Fernando Villalobos joined?

M: No, Fernie came in in June and I came in in September, or he came in in May or April--something like that.

E: The same year, I mean.

M: Yes, the same year.

E: Did you ever know Hilary Sandoval?

M: Yes, I did.

E: Did you know him well?

M: To a certain degree; we were never of the same mind. We fought each other more than anything else.

E: Was it a political contrast?

M: It was a political contrast; I was very much of a conservative oriented individual, \_\_\_\_\_ type individual. His theory was a very aggressive type of thing.

E: Was he more of a liberal?

M: He was a liberal to a certain degree. He wasn't liberal in my book.

E: Precisely what do you do as an SBA officer?

M: I really wear three hats here. I'm an assistant loan officer; I process loans and submit them to the chief of finance for final approval. I'm a Minority Enterprise Representative, which is an interesting position. It's an advocacy position, trying to make sure that minorities get a fair shake of what SBA has to offer. Then I'm what they call a Business Development Specialist or an Industrial Planner. I run the contracting program for

the Small Business Administration, where we obtain contracts [for] manufacturing service, this type of thing with other federal agencies, and subcontract the work to firms that are owned by disadvantaged individuals.

E: In your line of work you have probably become familiar with the seats of economic power in this community. I'd like to ask you: Who do you consider to be the most or more influential Mexican Americans in the El Paso community, with regard to economic power and influence?

M: It depends how one is looking at it because economic power...it depends how you use economic power that really makes you influential to a certain degree. One of the most influential men that I personally know is Alfredo Jacques of...owner and president of Jacques Produce, basically because the man has learned how to use economic stability and strength to gain the things that he would like to gain for himself and his family. He uses his economic power as an active tool in politics. He uses it as an active tool in civic affairs and does his share in developing those concepts and factors which man must achieve to say that he has done his part for the betterment of society.

E: Mr. Jacques would certainly be one, would you say?

M: Yes.

E: Could you name others?

M: Well, I would say the late Hilary Sandoval was one of them, but he did it out of pure political power. I think there's a CPA by the name of Salazar here that has moved himself into that area.

E: What is his first name?

M: I think it's Ray, Ray Salazar. He's developed a good practice plus he's influential and he's done it in a very smooth way. He's influential in both political parties. And this way he's been able to break into the good large accounts. I think there's several doctors in this community that have broken in this way, but they don't come out so much in the light. I think these people are far more influential than your local politicians holding office; because to me it is very obvious that to hold political office you're going to have to be very, very flexible. Of course, this may be a fact of life in American politics. By being flexible you're going to have to give in a lot of your principles and ideas [in order] to be given the support and push to hold a political office. So, in essence, I don't feel that a lot of our political office holders are that influential.

E: Going back to the people with economic power and influence or the potential to be influential, are there any other people that you consider prominent in your mind?

M: To be able to do things they want to do and to me to be able to develop this, to be influential in the community--you've got to understand that putting in the concept of what I interpret to be influential--is not someone that arises overnight, holds power for a few years and then is forgotten. Many of our politicians...Raymond Telles did that--rose to power then collapsed, ended up actually working for another political party. To me the influential individual is the one who's



influential year after year after year. So there are very few of those. That's the reason I believe the field is very limited, especially among Mexican Americans.

E: In talking to some of your colleagues, the opinion has been expressed that loan officers, bank loan officers, hold crucial positions in the community. The opinion has further been expressed that it is necessary, if the Mexican American is to advance significantly, for those positions to be filled by Mexican Americans. Do you place the same kind of emphasis on that?

M: I don't think so. I think they're limiting the loan officer to a position that is not really realistic. Loan officers in our banking community are only tools, are only things that represent the philosophy and concept of what the owners of the bank, the people that really run the bank, are all about. I don't think that we're going to... You can get the best loan officer, the best advocate for minorities in the loan officer position and he "ain't" going to be worth much ; he's not going to do much unless you're able to change the whole concept of the banking structure in this community. Most of the banks are owned by, are controlled by, a family type of situation. Until that changes you're not going to be able to really say that the loan officer is really that strong, because loan officers in general would like to do many things, but they can't do it. So, as I say, unless you change the upper structure, you can put the real fine individuals who have all the empathy towards the thing that we're talking

about, and he's not going to be able to move because they're not going to let him move. So, until that top structure changes, until that happens you're not going to be able to do anything with loan officers at all. Once it changes then, yes. I think the loan officer position will be key. There is a tremendous vacuum in the loan officer, well, throughout the banking industry, of minorities. You have a lot of token guys there, and that's exactly all they are. They're token people with no power whatsoever, other than the fact that they have them there so people can see that the bank has a Mexican American, but they can't do...they just can't do much.

E: Who do you consider to be the most prominent figure in El Paso banking circles who is Mexican American?

M: Well, probably in terms...one has to look at what we're shooting at. In terms of involvement in civic affairs, in terms of using his influence to help those that he can help, probably Joe Herrera at the State National Bank. In terms of aggressive representation of a Mexican American that is going places in the banking business, that is probably Gonzales over at the Southwest National Bank.

E: Art Gonzales?

M: Art Gonzales.

E: What do you consider to be the chief economic institutions in this city?

M: I think the chief institutions in this city are people like Fred Hervey, Mr. Young--in that sense. You don't have institutions per se, because the institutions are controlled by individuals.

E: They're personified, in other words?

M: Yes.

E: Do you think the only thing that will change this is time?

M: I think with time it will change. See what happens, let's take an example at the bank. There have never been enough people. I think the El Paso National Bank probably has the worst turnover in personnel than any business that I've ever known. Until a group of men get in there that are able to tell Mr. Young, or maybe some of the depositors, and there's plenty of Mexican American depositors that could walk in there and tell him--until that group gets together and tells that man, "Look, times have changed. You need to change your attitude; you need to change your concepts," it's not going to happen. And I don't think time is going to do it because his family is going to carry on this philosophy. You can't really blame them. If nobody is ever bucking them, why rock the boat (putting ourselves in their position)? They've been successful. They've had economic, political and social power, and nobody's ever bucked them. Why change things just because someone or some kind of new theory says so? You're not going to change until there is social pressure for change.

E: Do you foresee this social pressure as coming about?

M: Yes, but I think it's coming very slow. You know, I've thought a lot about this, especially now that I'm actively involved in LULAC. Sometimes I feel that we missed the boat in the '60s. We should have been out in the streets burning with the Blacks. I think things would have changed because one of the things

that I see in this position that I'm in and as I travel, and I do travel in my position, is that the Blacks have made it. Whether they're academically prepared or not, they are holding the top positions throughout government, industry, etc. The Mexican American isn't. We've missed the boat someplace. Now, I think, as I talk to more people, I find that there is some leaning towards, "We've got to have a unified radical change now." Until we've got enough people leaning that way, then I think things will change. I think those that control the balance of society realize this. But they're not going to give in until we demand it. But they're not going to give in with only a handful of people demanding; it's got to be the numbers.

E: Do you think the interests of the Blacks are pretty much intertwined with the interest of the Mexican American and other minority groups?

M: I think so. I think all minority groups want to have a chunk of the pie, you know, of the things that this country has to offer an individual, a citizen: the right of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" whatever it may be for different individuals. It eventually comes down to economics. Everybody wants to achieve that status in society where you can have the things you want. But I think the difference is that the Blacks are getting there very rapidly. They have learned to help each other and once they have made it they have learned to keep that powerful position, until all their people have made it. I think the Blacks have become just as selfish as the

Anglo has, once they've made it. Maybe it's good, maybe it's not; I don't know.

E: Do you think this is human nature?

M: Yes. I think it is human nature.

E: Do you think the Mexican American will be like that, too?

M: I think the Mexican American will probably get that way once he learns to get to the top as a group. Our problem is that as an individual we're already that way. Individuals get to the top and they forget to look back. Of course, the people at the bottom have not learned to push an individual further up with the understanding that when he gets to the top he's going to pull a few of them up. All we're doing now is pulling the guy that's at the top down. The easiest way for any Chicano, a Mexican American, whatever you want to call him, to become very unpopular is to try to get some kind of success at the top and you'll see how fast, how unpopular he can become among his own people.

E: You mentioned the point a little while ago that perhaps the Blacks who have ascended to top positions may or may not have the academic qualifications or whatever qualifications may be required. What kind of emphasis do you place on qualifications? For instance, let's say that a Mexican American were to be offered a certain job or that the Mexican Americans as a group lobbied for that job and it's rather obvious that the candidate does not have the qualifications necessary. Would you still see the end as justifying the means?

M: No. I don't think that that individual should be put in a position that he's not qualified for. I think that if the

individual is in a position that he can be trained fast enough to do the job, fine, give him a crack at it. I think that there is one tremendous misconception and unfortunately many, many Mexican Americans hold this. Mexican Americans at high level positions hold the attitude that our people are not prepared to hold high executive positions. I hear it so often said, "Well, we've never had the opportunity, therefore we don't have the trained people." Yet I disagree very much with this concept. Most of the people that are saying this are people that have reached a certain position, prominent job status in pay, in those areas of being recognized as being a leader. I think they're saying that out of the biggest fault our people's attitudes have created; that is, they're afraid of saying, "Yes, we have so many qualified that one is going to come and replace me." Personally, I think that if you look around you're going to find some outstandingly qualified individuals. Let's take some examples. In a position in government they say, "Well, the guy has never had training. There are not enough trained Mexican Americans to hold a position." Yet you look at a corporation. You can walk into the Popular today and some of their quiet, second-in-command people, people that are in the position day-to-day making decisions, policy, but that don't have the title. Certainly they are well experienced to move into the top spot; they just don't do it because the corporation is held by a family. You can go to most large industries: Texaco, Standard Oil, Asarco-- you have some outstanding Mexican Americans that have been there

for years. They just don't make it because they are not given the opportunity to move to the top. To me, in order to have the qualifications to hold the position does not mean that, if you're going to become an executive or a branch officer in an executive position, you have to have been in the same position with the same title elsewhere. Because experience, techniques, ability to use your tools to get the job done and do it right, is really what counts and not titles. This is where I think our people are being held back. It's something that they're very sincere about...when they say our people... that there aren't enough trained Mexican Americans. I don't know how you are going to overcome it except that you're going to have to go out to the public. I go out to the public quite often and say these things and have them look around. There are many qualified Mexican Americans. If one just stops to think there is a heck of a lot of them ready to move into positions of management, decision making. They've got the experience--as much experience as anybody else.

- E: Of course, there are some activists who would say that perhaps Mexican Americans don't need nearly the experience that you would have them have. In other words, they are speaking in a reparation frame of mind. They are saying that Chicanos have been held down since 1848 or whenever, and that Anglo Americans have eaten of the fruits of their fathers' sins and have enjoyed them and are continuing to enjoy them. Therefore, the Mexican American shouldn't be forced to go through that rise to the top-rung by rung experience. What would your answer be to that?

M: As a district director of LULAC I run into this very often.

There is no way in the world that you can convince those that have the attitude that it's not proper. I like to approach in this way: You know the country offers a system that is, indeed, successful. There are certain rules that you have to learn and you have to comply with before you yourself can be successful. I think what our people need to do is: number one, learn the rules and play by the same rules the Anglo has used to achieve prominence. I'm just saying that our people cannot force those that have not had any type of experience on society, because then everybody is going to be hurting. What I am saying is that we have already a cadre of individuals prepared to be able to move into these positions. But in order to find them, to convince them to move into those positions, it's going to take pretty much of a complete...what is the term that I want to use without hurting the whole thing here...for a lack of a better term, we're going to have to educate ourselves that sacrifices are going to have to be made. He's going to have to risk security of being in the same position for many years to be able to move to another job where he can help others to move to the top. Unless you do use your better individuals to push them up, you yourself are not going to be able to get to the top. Because when a qualified Mexican American or Chicano, or whatever you want to call him, gets to the top and he in turn can bring somebody up that does not have as much experience, teach him and guide him so that eventually he can learn by being put in a position and being guided by someone who knows; eventually he'll be prepared also and you pass it on down.



E: You seem to have given these matters much thought. You articulate your answers very well and very rapidly. I would like to ask you: When did you first begin to be politicized as regards, for instance, the LULAC? When did you begin to get interested in the Mexican American?

M: I began to get interested in the Mexican American very young. I never in my mind until this day...you know, everybody has their own particular thing they hang on to. I still, even though I've been very lucky and I've been able to catch up to a certain degree in my education, I'm very resentful as to the fact that I was not able to go to an elementary school and from there on I began questioning. A lot of the education that I gained was by myself. The thing that bothered me more was that it wasn't as much as the Anglo handicapped individual that was being kept back; it was the minorities. It bothered me and I questioned it. I began questioning everything at a very early age. If we have political power, which we definitely should have, we are a one party state, with the majority of the votes being of one minority, why the hell for the last 100 years haven't we made a move anyplace? You know, we could of easily turned to the other party and condemned them as well. Why the hell haven't they made a move to get these people someplace? I think basically what it is, it is strictly a social problem of the Anglo keeping us down as long as we permit them to. I think it came at a very early age.

E: What do you thing of the word "Chicano"?

M: I don't mind it; I use it. It's a tool. As I say, one has to learn to use tools in order to survive in this society. It

doesn't bother me whatsoever. I've used it in speaking and communicating with the other Chicanos. I've found it very useful in communicating with the Chamber of Commerce crowd. They don't seem to comprehend the Mexican American as an entity that has needs and requirements, but they do understand the word "Chicano." I don't know what kind of context they give it, but they understand it and you can get their attention by saying it. I do not condemn the Chicano Movement and the Revolution at all. I think it's needed. I think it's a very vital part of our overall movement. I think if we could just learn to work together... I think that a lot of the Mexican Americans would agree with me. We need it. I think many Mexican Americans in high positions sort of find some kind of joyful streak in their thoughts when they read about a Chicano Movement and this kind of thing because they are saying, "Damn it, straighten up or this is what is going to happen." Unfortunately what personally bothers me more is that a lot of these Chicano advocates are doing a hell of a lot of good for our people. The very fact that what they do is having an influence, but I think their lives all in all are being hurt by it. I think what would be ideal is for everybody to take a turn being Chicano, and then go back and get into the mainstream. But we're hurting a lot of good young thought by just letting them be the Chicano all the time.

E: You have to sacrifice yourself.

M: This is true; you have to do that. Of course, many of us... I ask myself, "Why don't I sacrifice?" You know, you do your own thing but not the real sacrifice. They're making it.

E: In talking to a prominent Mexican American here in El Paso, he made the comment that the Mexican American has always had a language problem primarily, but that he has never had a color problem. In other words, that the Anglo has never really discriminated because of color but rather because of language. What do you think about that statement?

M: I think the language is a problem that definitely has hindered our growth. I don't think that it is neither so much language or color--it's the name. I think that is what it all comes down to. Otherwise I think you'd see a lot more Mexican Americans or Chicanos in the government roles, or in the high corporation roles, because when they get the list of names...that's where a lot of it comes from.

E: What is there in names that elicits this discriminatory feeling?

M: Well, I think basically it's the old WASP concept that the Mexican American is a second class citizen. He's lazy. It's just not the type of individual that you would want to hang around.

E: You would say that it's not because of language. It's not because of color. It's rather because of preconceptions that the Anglos have of the inefficiency of Mexican Americans.

M: Yes, that has a lot to do with it. The reason I disagree with the language part is because, I'll give you one example. I was once at the City Council meeting and a Mexican woman got up to speak and her English was just atrocious. It was bad. When she got through speaking you could see everybody smiling as she mispronounced the words and this kind of thing. You could immediately sense it. Everyone was giggling inside themselves--typical "Mexicano," typical Mexican trying to get up and say something

in the language he doesn't even control. Yet at the same meeting...and the woman sat down, you know, without much of a reaction and she said some darn good things. At the very same meeting...and as she sat down there was a German lady there who knew what the woman wanted to say and she got up and said it almost in the identical words of the lousy English, terrible enunciation, terrible accent. She got applauded. It wasn't the fact that the English was bad. The fact was that one was a Mexican and the other wasn't. She was closer to what we call the Anglo society.

E: What do you think about the GI Forum?

M: I think the Forum could be an instrumental group. Unfortunately they are dominated by just one or two individuals. They're a paper organization. It's real sad to say that because I thought that the Forum could play an important role, but they blew it like a lot of other organizations have. They just didn't get in line, in time.

E: What do you think<sup>k</sup> of MECHA at UTEP?

M: I think MECHA at UTEP is good and it's bad. I think they alienate a lot more people than they need to...again this is a little nuclei control that they feel they must have in order to be able to accomplish their objectives. I think that's what hurts this type of organization. But, again, I think that at this time and at this age MECHA is playing a very vital role towards the advancement of the Mexican American.

E: What do you think of the Raza Unida Party?

M: I think the Raza Unida Party is not a serious threat to the political structure of our country at all. But I think that

they do have a tremendous message that they are bringing to everybody--at least to the Mexican American, especially in this state. I don't think the Raza Unida party is going to make it anywhere else, especially in this state where we are a one party state, where the Mexican American has been dominated by that one party--taken for granted before the election, forgotten after the election. They're trying to tell them, "Look, for the last 100 years you have been voting for the same guys. You haven't gotten any place. Don't you think it's time that you start going somewhere else?" Of course, I don't think the Mexican American is going to move until the Republican party offers something else. I think that's the message that this third party movement is bringing to the people. Recently in an airplane I heard something. An Anglo said something that I thought was quite funny; [yet] it was sad to a large degree. I was flying from Dallas to El Paso. They were kidding about the Watergate deal and the tapes and this kind of thing. Then the guy says: "Well, you know everybody has their own pet peeve. The Republican Party has their tapes and the Democrats have their Mexicans." Sad, very sad, but unfortunately it's the truth.

E: What do you think of LULAC?

M: I think LULAC has done good in the area of education. I think it has changed radically in the last three or four years. I think it's moving more and more into the area of civil rights. I would not even hesitate to say that in the next ten years LULAC is going to be a very active part of a political movement in the state of Texas. All in all it's got the numbers. All in all it's got the financial strength.

E: How many LULAC members are there in El Paso?

M: In El Paso, active members, they amount to 475. If you take the rosters of the councils it amounts to about 1,700.

E: How many councils are there?

M: There are eight councils in this district.

E: What is your position in council number eight?

M: I don't hold any position at all in council eight. I am the District Director in charge of all the councils.

E: What do you perceive to be the main function of LULAC in the El Paso community?

M: I think the main function of LULAC has been trying to get financial aid to Mexican Americans that cannot obtain scholarships, that is, your C+ and your B student. It's good work and this has been the thrust of LULAC for many years. Plus it has been a quiet advocate. It has been the type of advocate that accomplishes things but does not take bows for it. They do it and get it over with and leave it at that, realizing that in trying to help an individual or create a certain reaction to a certain matter we get a lot of help from non-minorities. If we start publicizing a lot of this, it's going to make more enemies than friends. The objective at that time is what is important and as long as we accomplish it, it's good. I think LULAC is steadily, in this community, moving more and more toward becoming the true advocate of the Mexican American. We spend more and more of our time fighting to get Mexican Americans in high positions. We spend more and more of our time getting those services that are supposed to be free to poor, disadvantaged individuals.

We are going to find ourselves more and more in that area. We're finding ourselves fighting for people, using every possible tool that we can get our hands on to fight for people. I think eventually LULAC, unless something drastic happens, is going to become the civil rights tool of the Mexican American.

E: I noticed a few months ago one of the councils honored a local Anglo American attorney, along with two other people I believe, for services that he had rendered to LULAC. I'd like to know how many Anglo Americans in this community feel that LULAC is performing a good job, a positive job. What kind of support do you have in the Anglo American community?

M: I think we have some good support from the Anglo American community. But I think that support is going to dwindle. Although we have a lot of people that are sympathetic to our cause, in the past it's been support in terms of projects, in terms of dollars and cents: their buying ads from us, their buying raffle tickets from us, their donating to our case. But they look at LULAC as a conservative establishment organization, representing the established Mexican American. But as the organization has become more and more of an advocate...I'll give you an example. The superintendent of schools, Mr. Whitaker, has probably been one of the champions of LULAC, but he is probably one of our worst critics now simply because we were after something we felt he was not doing right. We fought him on it. And the thing is, the more we do this, the more they are going to become critics of us. Sure, they're going to be alienated. We are stepping on ground that they feel that should not be stepped on.

And they felt that they had contributed and bought us off. One of the leading utility companies, we caught them with their hands down, in an awful way. We came to see them, the national president came to see them with our attorneys. They said, "You know, we are aware of the situation and we're going to do something about it." Our national president gave them two weeks. Well, by the time he got on the plane and arrived at his office in Phoenix, there was a pledge there by the utility company for \$100,000 to the organization. This is the kind of thing that has been happening in the past. The difference today is that we took some money--as we always have--but we filed suit anyway. I tell you, this makes enemies for you, once you start questioning things. I think LULAC is moving more in that area. You are going to see it highly criticized.

E: Do you think that LULAC will ever go the route of the NAACP in this respect--in hiring some of the nation's best known civil libertarian lawyers to put the cases before the United States Supreme Court and such things?

M: Yes, I would venture to say that it's going to take us ten more years. It's going to take us that because we're going to have to get rid of a lot of the older members whose total concept of LULAC is not one of civil rights. Again, you have to understand their position. They are people of prominence in the community, people of wealth. They've made it by being pacifists, quiet and not rocking the boat. You can't blame them. Why rock the boat now? So until we get rid of a lot of that type of individual we aren't going to be able to move in that area.



But I think we are fast heading that way. We are moving to an area where equal employment opportunity committees are being formed and we're going after them. We're going to a lot of attorneys and asking for their help. The good thing about it is that most young attorneys, whether they are minorities or not, are willing to help; they do help.

E: I'd like to go into the final phase of this interview. Now, you realize that the United States is in the process of celebrating its two hundredth birthday as a nation. There is a Bicentennial Commission set up in this town. There are also festivities planned. I would like to ask you: As a Mexican American living in El Paso, Texas, in 1975, how do you relate to the entire concept of the American Bicentennial?

M: I think the entire concept of the American Bicentennial is just excellent. I think the mode of operation, which is being used to carry out that concept stinks. Out of the overall Committee which runs the Bicentennial in El Paso, it has one Mexican American, yet our population is 58%. I have no beef with the concept at all. The country has been good. It's been good to a lot of our people. It's still going to be good to a lot of our children. I wouldn't want my child to grow up anywhere else. That I have no gripes with. I think there is something that should be recorded and should be read because we are trying to get a message to the Anglo institutions which they are not getting. One of the LULAC councils has a project which I think is just outstanding. Their Bicentennial project is to build a statue of Benito Juárez. A lot of people are saying, "By God, why not Abraham Lincoln or George Washington?" I'm sitting there looking at these people that are looking at this

and missing the message. We are reaching the two hundredth birthday of our country and Mexican Americans are having to go to build a statue of a hero who fought for the liberty of those that were oppressed, to try to create a symbol for our people to move and become part of mainstream America. I think that if it is ever erected it will be a hell of a symbol. And it should remind a lot of people that at the two-hundredth mark, the equality that is promised and preached by everybody else was not there. The equal opportunity was not there. I think the very silent movement of this particular group of individuals to build this statue of Benito Juárez is just excellent.

E: How do you identify or relate to the founding fathers of this country: Washington, Adams and Jefferson?

M: Well, I relate to them on the grounds that they fought to get away from something that they could not cope with, but they wanted to build their own thing. They wanted to build a country where everybody would have a so-called "equal opportunity." Just because they were of certain beliefs, liberal maybe, they wanted to be left alone and just given the same opportunity that everybody else had. The same story of the Mexican American today. We relate that way...we want to do the same thing. We don't want to carry a musket and go down and fire at the establishment though. We want the establishment to relate to the things that they were trying to represent.

E: These same people, some of them, were known for taking a severe, a very strong anti-Indian stance as America grew in its early years. In fact, some of the Indian extermination policies were condoned by some of these people. What do you

think their views would be toward a minority group today,  
like the Mexican American?

M: Oh, probably it would be hard to relate to them because, of course, the Indian was here, and unfortunately he was considered to be a heathen, uncivilized, this kind of thing. Just so they don't consider us in the same way, although I know some of them do. It would be hard to relate to that.

E: That was an unfair question, I think. I'd like to ask you: How do you feel about the principles on which this country was founded, say for instance, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution, or the statement regarding the freedom to pursue happiness about which Jefferson wrote? What are your thoughts about those rights?

M: Well, if we continue to practice them as we have in the past, we'll be heading for trouble. If we could practice them the way they are intended to be, equal opportunity for everybody-- that is, capable of achieving the opportunity that one is looking for, I think we'll be all right. I find it personally very hard to condemn it because I have not seen a better system yet. In fact, I've seen some pretty bad ones.

E: This ends the interview with Mr. Murillo.