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Interview no. 190

Moroni Flores

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Moroni Flores (1929-)
INTERVIEWER: Richard Estrada and Oscar J. Martínez
PROJECT: Bicentennial
DATE OF INTERVIEW: August 14, 1975
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Member of Mormon Church.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; organization of ejidos in México; Anglo Mormons vs. Mexican Mormons; attitudes toward the Bicentennial.

2 hours.
43 pages.

BICENTENNIAL

E: Mr. Flores, where were you born, sir?

F: I was born in Colonia Dublán, Chihuahua, México.

E: In what year, sir?

F: 1929.

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

F: My parents were agricultores, ejidatarios. I loved them a lot.

They mean a lot to me. My father passed away last year. We grew up in an agricultural environment.

E: Was your father always a farmer?

F: Always a farmer.

E: Had his family lived in Colonia Dublán all their lives?

F: No. His family came from San Buenaventura, Chihuahua.

E: And what about your mother? Could you tell me something about her background?

F: Well, she always lived there. Her family's native to the region.

E: Is she a housewife?

F: Yes.

E: Could you tell me something about your formative years in that area of Chihuahua--your schooling, growing up and so forth?

F: I went to school in the Mormon school there, which was an English-speaking school. I went through the eighth grade, and then attended three years of secondary school there. That was the extent of my education.

E: Were you born a Mormon, Mr. Flores?

F: Yes, I was born a Mormon.

E: How about your parents?

F: Both of my parents were born Mormons, and my grandparents on both sides were converted.

E: Do you have any idea what year they were converted to the Mormon faith?

F: I'd say around the 1890s.

E: What were the circumstances surrounding that conversion?

F: Well, on my maternal side, there was something very interesting. My grandfather, when he was very young, had a dream. He related this dream to his mother. They used to live in the Viejo Casas Grandes, and this dream was that a couple came to him in the night--a man and a woman. The man did the talking, and addressing him then by name told him, "Toribio, I want you to buy the history of my people." He gave him una moneda, a coin; he said about a fifty-cent coin. Then they departed, but when they were going to go out the door, the man and the woman talked between themselves. Then the man came back to where my grandfather was and asked him for the coin he had given him. He gave him a bigger coin--un peso, like a peso coin. And the dream ended. The next morning he told his mother about it. The family was devoted to Santo Niño de Atocha; that was the saint of their devotion. His mother told him, "Well, go buy it." He went and he bought it. This was when he was young. Later on he went to work with a Mormon, Lithius. One day when they were eating, this man told my grandfather about the history of his people, El libro de Mormón. He asked him whether he would want to read it. My grandfather said, "Yes, I'd very much like to read it," because he remembered at that point the

dream he had had years before. He asked, "How much is it worth?" The man said, "It was worth 50 centavos, but it's now worth one peso." Then he remembered the details of the dream. So he got the book and he read it, and he was converted by reading the Book of Mormon.

E: Did your grandfather always live among the Mormon people there in the Casas Grandes area?

F: Except for the two years that he was sent to San Juan de Uloa.

E: In what years were these?

F: 1908 to 1910, more or less.

E: This was the last two years of the Porfirio Díaz regime. Do you recall him ever telling you what the circumstances were?

F: Well, it had to do with the Organización del Ejido.

M: At that time they were organizing ejidos? How were they doing that?

F: I don't know, I don't know the details. I know there they had trouble with the Corralitos Land Company, and part of the land of the Corralitos Land Company finally was to form part of their ejido in Casas Grandes.

E: Do you recall any stories about any violence that may have taken place against people like your grandfather?

F: Oh, yes. One instance I remember very clearly they talked about is when Mr. Houghton, who was the administrator I think of the Corralitos Land and Cattle Company, came down to where he and about ten ejidatarios were building the ditches or canals to irrigate the land with. He had a detachment of federal soldiers with him to run them off the lands. My grandfather told his ten companions to get into the ditch and he went out to talk to Mr. Houghton and the soldiers. He told them to get off because the canal was full

of ejidatarios; and if they treasured their life any, they better get off. They got off; but they were constantly harrassed.

E: So they actually worked land as ejidatarios at that time?

F: That was the start. I think the ejido really came into being some years later, I think around 1920.

E: Was this land owned in common by these people, or was there private ownership?

F: The ejido was subdivided into lots, running around fifteen hectarias to each family. Most of the canal work is done communally, but the family itself takes care of about fifteen hectarias.

E: This is true of the ejido system as it evolved after the Revolution. Do you know what similarities or what differences existed between that system and the ejidatario system that your grandfather, for instance, was trying to establish?

F: Well, I think essentially the same would be true of el ejido before and after. The problem at that time was establishing an ejido on land [that was] then by government decree given to private ownership, and had been taken away from the pueblos as stipulated by colonial rules governing the ownership of land. I remember him mentioning el bando del caballero de Croá which had established el ejido de Casas Grandes in the first place, but which subsequent governments had, in fact, given away to private ownership.

E: This was Teodoro de Croá. He was the commandant of the Provincias Internas in the 18th century, I believe.

F: He had in his possession el bando del caballero de Croá, which established los linderos del ejido. In fact, I remember him mentioning once that in order to take this to México City once in

their effort to establish their claim, he gave himself como : conscrito en el ejército, and so they gave him safe passage to México City. He had this wrapped around his body so they wouldn't detect it. That's the way he got it down to México.

E: So he actually allowed himself to be drafted specifically to go to México City and put this before the courts?

F: Right.

E: Do you know whatever happened to this document?

F: No. As far as I know, from what I could gather from his conversations, it stayed in México City with the proper authorities.

E: This is extremely interesting, because at this time the exact same conditions were existent in south-central México--in the state of Morelos, for instance--where Emiliano Zapata was taking such documents to México City to put them before the courts. I think historians should take note of this particular manifestation in the north. What happened to your grandfather after his two years in San Juan de Uloa?

F: After Porfirio Díaz was overthrown, these type of prisoners were let free. He came back home and started his life where he'd left off, finally organizing the ejido. He was one of the organizers of the ejido.

M: In the 20s and in the 30s?

F: Yeah.

E: What was your grandfather's name?

F: Toribio Ontiveros.

M: Do you remember your grandfather talking about the beginning of the Mormon settlements there?

F: Not specifically. My only recollection of his talking about the church was his conversion; and later during the Mormon exodus he

took care of the property that was left there by the people that joined the exodus.

M: In Colonia Dublán?

F: In Colonia Dublán and Colonia Juárez.

E: This exodus took place in 1912, is that right?

F: I think that's correct.

M: In growing up, what do you remember about the feeling of the Mexican people in that area about the Mormon settlement there?

F: I think they accepted the colonists. At least I can't remember any animosity, any feeling of having been done wrong or anything of this sort. I think it was a very normal relationship, if such a thing is possible.

M: One sometimes hears that the Mormons took the best lands in the area and appropriated the water, and left local people without water.

F: That's a fact, that's a fact. It's no tale. But the Mexican Mormons maybe fatalistically accepted the situation. Within the framework of existing laws and customs they learned to live with the situation, although they were very well aware of the fact that something was wrong somewhere. But they weren't about to rock the boat within the church framework.

M: What about Mexicans outside the church?

F: That has always been a bone of contention, and I think the ejido movement is aimed at correcting some of these inequalities. In fact, I was involved in some of this myself in the 1950s. I attended an ejidatario meeting, because I was an ejidatario myself, wherein we were informed that--as far as appropriating any more land for perspective ejidatarios--the Mormons had already bought the higher-ups. Nothing could be done at that time, but

that money had been paid to either the Jefe del Departamento Agrario or somebody up there.

E: By the Mormons?

F: By the Mormons. And, in fact, the Anglo Mormons made no secret about the fact that they could buy their way around. I heard one of them myself say, "La ley la llevo en la cartera."

M: Well, was Anglo American or Anglo Mormon land appropriated during the 1930s when the ejido movement was starting?

F: Not that I know of, really. I think the ones that were affected, as far as el ejido de Casas Grandes was concerned, was the Corralitos Cattle and Land Company.

M: Why were they able to avoid being appropriated?

F: I think their relations with the powers of _____ were quite well taken care of.

M: You're suggesting that they gave the officials money?

F: I'm not only suggesting it, I'm declaring it to be so.

E: Mr. Flores, I'm particularly interested in the relations between the non-Mormon Mexicans and the Mormon Mexicans. You said that there was a sort of peaceful co-existence there. Do you ever recall any expressions of antipathy between the two Mexican groups--the Catholic Mexicans and the Mormon Mexicans?

F: Not really. I guess it was there if you really were looking for it. Oh, they made fun of us--"los aleluyas"--but we got along rather well. Some of my best friends were Catholics.

E: You said you attended school where English was taught. What other students would attend, other than Mormons?

F: The well-to-do Catholics.

E: From the Casas Grandes area?

F: Yeah, and from the colony itself. But they had to pay higher tuition to get in, and so admission was restricted to those who could afford it.

E: Who were your teachers?

F: Anglo Mormons. They called them frustrated farmers. None of them, I don't think, was a teacher in the real sense of the word. But that's all they had and they did with what they had.

E: Were they male or female?

F: Both male and female.

E: Tell me, what kinds of subjects would they teach you? What would they concentrate upon?

F: Well, the three Rs in the context of Anglo history.

E: You say Anglo history--is it Anglo American history?

F: Anglo American history. I didn't realize it at the time, but I remember distinctly Thanksgiving and such dates, and I don't recall Cinco de Mayo or anything like this in the schedule. Occasionally they'd let us out because the other schools let out. No emphasis was placed on Mexican history that I can remember.

E: You were never taught any Mexican history at all?

F: Very perfunctorily I think.

M: Yet they named their colonies Colonia Juárez after Benito Juárez.

F: And Colonia Díaz in Sonora for Señor Porfirio Díaz.

M: Why do you think that was done?

F: I don't know. They must have had some semblance of respect and goodwill towards these men--I think Porfirio Díaz especially,

since he was the one that extended the concessions landwise and waterwise to the church.

E: While your grandfather was undertaking these ejidatario movements, what was the reaction of the Anglo Mormons [to] this ejidatario action? Did he ever tell you about it?

F: He never told me about what reactions, if any, there were. I'm sure there must have been because, as I say, I experienced it myself later on. They had something to say about our people being involved in the ejidatario movement as against their status quo as landowners.

E: Precisely what did they have to say about your involvement in the ejidatario movement?

F: They as much as accused me of being anti-church.

E: What was the basis for that allegation on their part?

F: No basis. They didn't expound on it, but this was very definitely their thrust.

E: Do you think they felt this way because you were in a way bucking their wishes, going against their wishes?

F: Well, I think they felt and they feel now that the ejidatario movement poses a definite threat to their well-being economically and socially.

E: So the interests of the Anglo Mormons lie with the conservative status quo existence?

F: Very definitely.

E: Mr. Flores, are there newspapers [or newsletters of any kind] published in the Anglo Mormon colonies?

F: Not that I know of. You must remember that the Mormon colonies exist within the context of the church. At one time the church

authorities, in fact, determined the social and material policies. So any letter of information or whatever there was, was within the context of church instruction or policy translated into social and financial dealings.

E: Have you ever seen any kind of a publication at all?

F: No, sir.

E: Mr. Flores, while you were living in the Casas Grandes area, what did you perceive the connection between Salt Lake City and the Mormons in Chihuahua to be? Was it a very definite chain-of-command type structure?

F: Oh, yes. In fact, we used to have one of the general authorities of the church down there every three months, I guess, for what we call State Conference. I think that there is a very definite communication between Salt Lake City and the colonies. In fact, the colonies for many years was a church in México, in all of México. The colonies provided the church leadership in all of the Republic.

E: Mr. Flores, have you ever heard anything about events in that area during the Cristero Rebellion in the late 1920s and the early '30s? Did you ever hear of anything that affected that area?

F: The only thing that affected the area was when Plutarco Elías Calles closed down the churches. I remember something about that. I was very young. I don't think it affected the church any, or the Catholic church either, but I heard about that. There was definite talk about that. But as far as anything drastic occurring, they didn't close our churches, and I don't think they closed any churches there.

E: Did you ever hear about any violence taking place in that general vicinity?

F: Not on account of that.

M: Could we return to his school years? What do you recall about your experiences as a child in that Mormon school?

F: Well, not much really. I was aware of my social standing, which was nil in comparison to the other boys and girls that went to school with me. One thing that stands out in my mind is when we presented a play about Tom Sawyer and I was a Black boy--what was his name--Jim?

E: Jim.

F: I was Jim, and I thought I played the part real well. That stands out in my mind.

M: You say you were aware of your social standing. How were you aware of it?

F: Well, I knew what my family's economic condition was compared to the other families.

M: How did that make you feel? What was the source of that feeling? Was that from your own family or was it motivated from what happened in the school?

F: I think it was what happened in the school. My family's always been very proud. They didn't let me know that I was deprived in any way. In fact, my dad always tried to provide the best within his limited means. I remember he bought a washing machine that had a gas motor, because we had no electricity. He bought a radio. These things really stand out in my mind. I mean, this was something, but, we knew our limitations.

M: What was the general view, in your estimation, about the Anglo Mormons toward the Mexicans here at that time?

F: It was, I think, condescending, paternalistic. We were, in fact, the peones, they were the hacendados. They had the means. The feeling was definitely there. At that age you don't really think too much about it. I mean, you learn to live with it.

M: When did you first realize that that existed?

F: When I went on my mission.

M: When was that?

F: 1949.

M: What happened?

F: Well, when I went on my mission, I had — Anglo companions who wanted to play basketball. That was all they wanted to do, and yet they were my leaders. I didn't make Senior Companion until the last six months of my mission. I remember one incident, particularly. There were four of us working on Monterrey, and they got together and they told me to go get their shirts which were at the laundry. At that point I said, "To hell with it. You go get your shirts." This kind of shook them up because I had never acted this way. So I started to think about my past and about what was ahead. I think that finally at that point I identified the factors involved in my association with them, and I think this was the first time I really identified what we would call discrimination.

M: Could you tell us about more instances of discrimination, as you saw it?

F: Well, I think it was very obvious. The Anglos always had the leadership positions. The Anglos always had more money. The Anglos had cameras, all the things that money can provide and the Mexican missionaries didn't have. [They had] barely enough to sustain themselves. But mainly it was a matter of leadership positions,

which I feel the Mexican missionaries were just as qualified, if not more so, than some of these Anglos that wanted to play basketball all the time.

M: In your estimation, did the Anglo Mormons have much to do with the socio-economic condition of the Mexicans?

F: Within the context of the colonies?

M: Yes. You mentioned the possessions that they had as opposed to the Mexicans not having these things.

F: I think so, and as I've thought about this later on in life, it is very interesting to me that when the Mexican Mormons came into the church the church had no more land to distribute to its members. This has always bothered me. So the Mexican Mormons had to either work for the Anglo Mormons as peones or go into the ejidatario in order to provide for their family.

M: The church gave lands to people down there?

F: Gave or sold at a very reasonable price, I don't know which-- probably both because the concession was given to the church, not to individuals and the church sub-divided the land amongst the colonists.

M: Up to what time? When did they put a stop to this practice of giving out land?

F: Probably 1930s.

M: Well, had they run out of land?

F: Well, I don't know if they had run out of land or whether they had sub-divided it in such a way that none was available.

M: But people like your grandparents were in the church since the 1890s and there must have been other people who came in up to 1930.

Were these Mexicans beneficiaries of church land?

F: No, no.

E: In your view, why were they not?

F: Because this was an Anglo venture. It was conceived as a haven for those who fled the United States at the time of the _____, and no allowances were made for the fact that there would be proselyting amongst the Mexicans within the framework of economics and land ownership.

M: Now, you also mentioned that discrimination was evident in the assigning of the leadership positions. In your view, was there a deliberate policy to keep the Mexicans in the positions of low leadership?

F: I don't know if it was deliberate or natural--the effects were the same. By natural, I mean we respect the status quo, we go with what's been done before. But we had a Mexican branch in Colonia Dublán, and with the exception of two or three, the branch presidents were all Anglo. In fact, when I came back from my mission in 1951 they were in the process of re-organizing the branch. When they were starting to talk about it, I proposed to the priesthood that if they installed an Anglo as branch president I would vote against it. I asked that they think about it and do likewise if they thought that this was the direction we wanted to go. I was ready to vote against it, and low and behold I was chosen as one of the counselors in the branch presidency; but they put an Anglo in, so they, in fact, tied my hands and I couldn't vote against it because I'd be voting against myself. At that time they had organized a Mexican ward here and I proposed that the branch

be organized as a ward over there. They finally consented to it and I was put in as counselor in the bishopric.

M: Was the result of leadership positions, the important ones going to Anglos and the less important ones going to Mexicans, largely a result of the lack of educational preparation on the part of Mexicans?

F: No, because those who had served or were serving had essentially the same type of education that any of our people had. So it wasn't an educational thing at all.

E: Mr. Flores, I'd like to go back to your personal background. After you got out of school--those few years that you did go to school down there--what did you do immediately afterwards?

F: I went to work on an ejido. I got an allotment of land.

E: Could you tell us what life was like at that time?

F: Hard. I mean, we lived as we say in Spanish "con la esperanza" and that's one of the reasons I decided to immigrate. We didn't have any water except what rain we had got. During the rainy season there was water in the river, so at that time we had water. But mostly it was just hoping that we'd have enough water to make the crop. So, in 1949 or 1950 seven ejidatarios mormones got together and drilled a well on my granddad's portion. It was a struggle to pay off the debt. In 1953 we had to install new pumping equipment to pump in more. So, we paid off the pump and we bought the motor from an Anglo Mormon for 25,000 pesos, for \$2,000--the rate of exchange was 8.50 to 1 at that time. The total bill was for \$3,000--34,000 pesos. At that time they devalued the peso, so we ended up paying 36,000, 37,000 pesos. That was in 1955, and I decided to quit because I just couldn't make it.

E: So what was the span of time in which you actually farmed in that area?

F: With the exception of the two years I was on my mission which was July 1949 through July 1951, I farmed from the time I was about eight years old. I helped my dad. And in 1948 I got my own allotment of land.

E: You were about 19 years old?

F: Right.

E: What kinds of crops did you grow?

F: Wheat, corn, alfalfa, vegetables.

E: Which was your most profitable crop?

F: Wheat and alfalfa.

E: What was there about wheat and alfalfa that [made them profitable]?

F: The price itself, plus the fact that there's very little labor involved. Essentially I think those would be the two factors.

E: Where were these crops marketed?

F: Locally.

E: Could you give us a run-down on what a typical day would be like for a farmer in those days?

F: Well, you'd get up at 5 o'clock and milk the cows and feed the pigs and take care of those kind of chores, and then go to the fields for the rest of the day until sundown. At that time you would milk the cows again and retire unless you had to water; then that was a twenty-four hour day.

E: Do you recall, would you mostly speak Spanish to your fellow Mexican Mormons?

F: Yes. All the time.

E: What kinds of social activities were there?

F: Dances, dramas, picnics.

M: That's within the church?

F: Within the framework of the church.

M: Socially, what was the relationship between the Mexican Mormons and the Anglo Mormons?

F: We didn't mix.

EL You didn't mix at all?

F: Except on school functions.

E: Were you ever invited into an Anglo Mormon home for a dinner, for instance?

F: No.

M: Was there any dating between Mexicans and Anglos?

F: There were two or three cases that I can remember.

M: Did you ever date any Anglo girls?

F: No.

M: Did you ever attempt to?

F: No, I was rather shy. No, I didn't attempt to.

M: Did any of your friends try to?

F: Yes. In fact, my brother-in-law, the one that's my brother-in-law now, used to date Anglo girls--or at least one Anglo girl.

M: What were his experiences?

F: I don't know. He's never talked about them.

M: There was an understanding that you shouldn't mix?

F: I think this was the understanding.

M: Were there any cases that you knew of where a marriage was contemplated, a mixed marriage, and opposition from the Anglos [or from the Mexicans] prevented it?

F: Yes. In fact, it wasn't really an Anglo. He was a mixed Anglo and Mexican. He wanted to marry a Mexican girl and they were opposed from the Anglo side.

M: But some mixed marriages have come about down there?

F: Yes, but not within the framework of the church--no Mormon mixed marriages. This one case that I'm talking about, they got married before she was a member of the church.

E: So there were actually sanctions by the Mormon church against Anglos and Mexicans marrying?

F: I wouldn't categorize them as sanctions.

E: Social barriers?

F: I think there was the understanding that this was not to be.

E: It was a social mores, in other words?

M: Well, there is a family here locally, the Gonzálezes.

E: Andrés González?

M: Yes, I think that that was the original man--goes back to the 19th century when he married an Anglo.

F: Well, this other case that I'm talking about is related to this family.

M: But in this case you have a Mexican man marrying an Anglo Mormon.

F: And her brother married a Mexican girl.

M: What happened then? Was that extremely unusual?

F: Very unusual.

M: Were there any problems of the descendents of these people in the colonies there?

F: Well, it's very interesting that the descendents of this other side of the family married Mexicans outside of the church. They didn't marry within the church.

M: Why was that?

F: I don't think they were accepted. I don't think these two girls were accepted within the framework of the Anglo community.

M: Why would non-Mormon Mexican girls be more acceptable than Mexican Mormon girls?

F: Social position, money.

M: So it was a class situation rather than the religious situation?

F: I would categorize it as both social and religious.

E: Mr. Flores, could you tell us about the mechanics of immigration that you went through?

F: Luckily for me my wife is an American citizen. She was born in Laredo, Texas, and I met her when I was on my mission working in Nuevo Laredo, México. But I didn't marry her to get across. In fact, she lived in México in the colonies for four years after we were married. I was set on being an ejidatario and making a go of it. When things didn't work out, then I applied for entry into the United States. This was shortly after we married. I think it was in 1952--we married in 1951. I was turned down because I could not obtain the Mexican visa. I could not obtain my Mexican visa because I had not enrolled in the Servicio Nacional de Conscritos. So I didn't have a cartilla militar. I went to the extent of buying a cartilla militar somewhere in Puebla. A friend of mine got it for me for 50 pesos. After I went through all that trouble--it took me three years--when I applied again, lo and behold, I didn't need a Mexican visa. All I needed was proof of marriage to an American citizen, which I supplied. The funny thing about it is that when I made application and they told me, "Well, go back home and we'll let you know." I got a letter asking if I'd be

present at such a date at the American Consulate in Juárez. And I came down to the Consulate not ready to emigrate--I was just thinking about some more paper work, more requisitos. When I came into the Consulate they gave me a number and when my time came they called me and they sent me to El Paso. I didn't even have a suitcase with me. Luckily for me a sister was living here, and so I had somewhere to stay. But I had no money, I had no suitcase, I had nothing. My family was over there. So, within a day's time I was over.

E: What did you do immediately to start settling yourself?

F: I started looking for a job. My brother-in-law was working for the GMC people, truck outfit. He got me a job there washing cars at 65¢ an hour, I think. I came over in October 1955 and [my wife] joined me in December 1955. I rented a third room in an apartment over on South Stanton, 110 1/2 South Stanton, on one side of the Gateway Hotel. It's a rooming house. We got two furnished rooms with a bed that sagged like a hammock and a stove that was 50 years old, and we shared the bath with the whole floor. We had three kids at that time and another one was on the way. We made it on 65¢ an hour until I lost my job three months later.

E: What was the nature of that?

F: They were just letting people go.

E: This was what year, sir?

F: February of '56. I lost my job and I was without work for I guess three months, two months maybe.

E: How did you live during that time?

F: I guess it was a miracle. I tell my wife now and then so I won't forget and so she won't forget it. I bought myself some dry

cereal and some cans of milk and I mixed more water than milk just to make myself believe that it was milk. I lived on dry cereal and canned milk for a long month.

E: Mr. Flores, did you know any other Mexican Americans who were going through the same kind of experience around this time? Was there a recession that might have brought this on?

F: Well, there were quite a few people out of work. I don't know what the reason was, but one of the other fellows that used to work there with me lost his job also at about the same time, maybe a month later. I looked for a job everywhere and I couldn't land one til I went into the microfilming business, and that's where I've been ever since.

E: I believe about this time this was the beginning of a recession which culminated in 1958.

F: After the Korean conflict?

E: It had more or less to do with other things, but the recession in 1958 was very severe and it started some time before that. Mr. Flores, precisely what did you do in your microfilming work at the outset?

F: Well, I didn't know anything about the business. Ironically it was a Mormon-owned business at the time, and I got in through a friend who worked there. He indicated that they were hiring people. At this time they had a lot of work. So I started cleaning up and filming. This is what I did--microfilm the actual documents. I graduated the lab processing and in about two years' time they sold the company to an outfit in Albuquerque. Part of the deal was that the employees would remain with the company. The company has changed owners three or four times now. I've stayed on.

- E: Mr. Flores, during the mid '50s and the late '50s, did you associate with any particular ethnic group over another?
- F: Yes, Mexican Mormons. I've been very involved in church work all my life, so it was natural I was associated with this particular group.
- E: Even during your period of economic distress you continued your association with the church?
- F: Yes.
- E: What church did you attend here in El Paso when you first got here?
- F: The Third Ward which was located on 608 S. St. Vrain.
- M: I wanted to ask you a question regarding those hard times that you experienced when you first got to El Paso. Did you apply to the church welfare program for assistance?
- F: Well, at that time Guillermo Valdez was the bishop for the ward. When my rent came due, which was \$45, I asked him for a \$50 loan which he gracefully gave me and which I repaid when my first paycheck came in. That was the extent of my involvement with church welfare and I'm grateful for it.
- E: What would you do in your spare time during these hard times in El Paso? Would the family take walks or were there picture shows to be gone to?
- F: Well, there's another angle to that. My wife was expecting our fourth child and she generally went to Laredo to be with her mother when the children came. So she had left the week that they laid me off without knowing that they were laying me off at that time. She left on a Friday, I think, and I was laid off either that day or the following day, I don't know. So, I didn't have to worry about them eating, but mostly I spent the time walking from

job sign to job sign looking for work.

E: What kind of jobs did you apply for?

F: Construction. I think at that time they were building a Liberty Hall addition to the County Building. If I remember correctly I applied there. I applied to other construction jobs. Being that I wasn't skilled in anything at all I thought this was about the best bet. But I couldn't land any job at all.

M: How many years of schooling did you complete?

F: Ten years. I was a sophomore in the Academia Juárez when I had to quit and help my dad with the farm.

E: Do you recall any other jobs that you applied for at this time?

F: I think I applied for a job at the Dodge dealership--I don't even recall what the name was--thinking that probably the little experience I'd had at GMC might help. But they weren't interested in what I had to offer.

E: How did you feel when you got turned down?

F: Depressed, very depressed.

E: Were you ever despondent?

F: No, not really. I knew something had to happen.

M: Did you ask members of the church for assistance in finding employment?

F: Yes.

M: But it was just very rough to find a job?

F: Right.

M: I'd like to ask you some questions now about your activities in the church here locally. You've always been a member of the Mexican Ward?

F: Right.

E: How has it been with this Mexican Ward and the Anglo American Mormons in El Paso? How have the relations been over these years since you've been here?

F: Well, I'll be very candid. Relations have been strained to say the least. I came here in 1955 and I was called to work as a Sunday School superintendent in the Ward. In 1959 I was called to preside over the Ward as bishop, and I presided over the Ward til 1963 I guess. At that time they split the Ward and organized the Seventh Ward, and I was called to serve as bishop of the Seventh Ward. During all this time we had race problems and I felt very strongly that this shouldn't be so within the church, and I called it to the attention of the church leadership. I wrote letters, I made myself heard in the councils of the church regarding this matter. Especially I felt very strongly that the welfare program was not being administered in response to the needs of the Mexican people, and I still feel this way. I feel that the welfare program as it is administered in this stake, at least, does not respond to the needs of the Mexican people. I've seen welfare commodities go to the Anglo Wards. We have been made to feel that if we have beans and rice this would be sufficient for our needs, while they got whatever beef or beef products there were. In fact, I remember once, and it will stay with me forever, I guess, I told the stake president that there was no lard, or shortening, in the bishop's storehouse. He replied, "There is plenty of peanut butter." And I told him, "Would you like to make tortillas with peanut butter or fry beans with peanut butter?" I mean, this was his attitude.

M: Was he joking?

F: No, he was serious. I've been on the High Council, so I've had occasion to audit Ward reports, so I know where welfare commodities

are expended, and it isn't in the Mexican Wards. I've seen car payments, house payments, medical payments in the amounts of hundreds of dollars, but only in the Anglo Wards.

M: Have Mexicans applied for these things and been turned down?

F: Yes. Repeatedly.

M: Who makes the determination of who gets the help?

F: The bishop should make the determination within the framework of funds available, so our Mexican Wards, being that our people are economically less advantaged, contribute less to the church. Therefore the criteria is that just there are no funds available locally. Now the theory is that the Wards can draw from the stake and the stake can draw from general funds, but this has not applied to the Mexican Wards per se.

M: You also mentioned problems of race. Could you give us some instances where this became a problem?

F: Oh, I think it's been a general problem in this area, particularly, maybe because of the choque de culturas. But I've heard public statements that [showed] definite racism. I've seen it.

M: Could you give us some examples of statements?

F: Well, for example, "Your people are lazy," "Your people are dirty." I think [these are] based on stereo-types.

M: Public statements?

F: Public statements and private statements.

M: In church talks does this come up?

F: Yes, Ward meetings.

M: Any others that you can recall?

F: Oh, I can't recall off hand. I've written many letters protesting these things.

E: Where are these letters kept, Mr. Flores?

F: I have a copy of them.

M: To whom have you directed these letters?

F: To the local authorities, to the general authorities.

M: Is there a relationship, in your view, between the attitudes and the actions of the local Anglo Mormon leadership in their views toward Mexicans? A relationship between the origin of many of the people who were in leadership positions, that is; many come from the colonies. Is there a carry-over between the traditions that they bring with them about the relationship between Mexicans and Anglos down there and the relationships that have evolved here within the church?

F: I think that is a very definite factor, but I don't think this is the only factor. Rather, I tend to believe that the local Mormon leadership reflect general social attitudes in a country as a whole, and especially geographically. They're not so different really than what one would encounter somewhere else.

M: Would you say then that the church in its teaching and its programs do very little to equip people within the church to have more realistic and less stereotypical views about minorities than people outside of the church?

F: Right. In fact, I think that the church in some instances reinforces this stereotype attitude towards minorities.

M: How does it do that?

F: In relation to the Mexican Americans, or the Mexicans in particular, because of what we find in the Book of Mormon.

M: And what is that?

F: The fact that Layman was cursed with a dark skin, and his descendants became lazy and filthy and so forth. So there's a definite carry-over of this which I believe is unwarranted, because whoever takes that view has not really read the Book of Mormon. That is not the impression that I get from reading the Book of Mormon.

M: What is your impression?

F: My impression is that our people, the Laymanites, have a definite promise; and that, in fact, they turned out to be the most just of the family since they were not destroyed and the Nephites were destroyed.

E: Mr. Flores, in El Paso, if you could choose between the middle class, the upper-middle class, and upper class, what class [is] the Anglo Mormon power structure from?

F: I'd say the upper-middle and upper class.

E: What kinds of occupations do the most prominent Anglo Mormons have that you know of?

F: Oh, doctors, dentists, teachers, their own enterprises.

E: Can you discern their general opinion about Blacks?

F: I think they're definitely against Blacks in the context of the social change that we have seen in the last 20 years. Furthermore I would think that some of the Mormon leaders, the Anglo Mormon leaders, belong to the John Birch Society. I cannot identify the individuals, but I have a pretty fair idea of who they are.

E: What are your feelings about the Black movement in the context that you spoke of?

F: I think it's great. In fact, I wrote a letter to Ezra Tap Vincent some time ago, because I disagreed with his pronouncements at one of the general conferences of the church wherein he identified the Civil Rights Movement as it was conceived then--and this was about ten or twelve years ago--as Communist inspired. I challenged him on that.

M: Did you get an answer?

F: No. His office sent me some prior statements that he had made confirming what he had said in that general conference. In fact, I accused him at that time of being a member of the John Birch Society, which was his right to be if he wanted to; but not to try to put their philosophy on within the framework of the church. But he never answered. In fact, I told him as far as I was concerned the civil turmoil that was then going on in the nation could be traced to the particular philosophy of the Manifest Destiny which has guided American foreign and internal policy for the last 100 years.

E: Mr. Flores, do you see the goals for social change of the Black and the Mexican American as being intertwined?

F: Very definitely.

M: Mr. Flores, I want to ask you a question regarding what is in the Book of Mormon about the Laymanites being cursed with dark skin. Have you ever seen a direct correlation between the implications of being cursed that way, and the views and actions of Anglos who may be teachers or occupy other positions of authority and their dealing directly with Laymanites and Mexicans in a setting of the classroom or in a congregation, and being paternalistic towards them?

F: I think so. I think, although it's very subtle--you can't pinpoint it, you can't underline it--but I think it's very definitely there. That's why I say it's ironic that this should be so when my impression of the whole Book of Mormon is quite different. To me, there's no such curse--not within the context of a dark skin. I think this matter of darkness emanates from Protestant philosophy and has nothing to do with the Gospel of Christ.

M: How do you interpret that passage, then?

F: I think it refers to the character of the individuals involved. But, again, we must take it within the context of the article of faith, which says that men will be judged by their own deeds, not by Adam's sin. That's the only logical context within which we can take the passage.

M: The implication in that passage, that these people were cursed with a dark skin, is that if you have a dark skin, then you're inferior. That's a way of punishing you. Therefore dark skin equals inferiority. You don't see it in the literal sense, then?

F: I don't accept it.

M: Well, what does the dark skin mean to you? Is that figurative meaning?

F: Completely figurative. Plus, as I say, it denotes certain conditions within which the individual lives--that is the content of his character.

M: Would you say that most Mormons interpret it literally?

F: I think so.

M: Have you ever written any letters concerning this interpretation?

F: No. I'm through writing letters to the church people.

M: Have you ever argued this position within the leadership of the church locally, and what reactions have you had?

F: That I'm all wet and that I don't know what I'm talking about. That interpretation comes from the top down, not from the bottom up.

M: Of course, there's a very famous church scholar who has a similar interpretation to the one that you have and his name escapes me.

F: Nibley?

M: Yes. Hugh Nibley.

F: But I think that he, in fact, apologizes, because when he treats the Negro question he certainly apologizes. He doesn't come through loud and clear.

M: Doesn't Nibley say that the reference to the Laymanites having the dark skin means being in darkness and not necessarily literally having the dark skin?

F: Right.

M: I wonder if we could move to the question of the Blacks now. What is your own interpretation of that doctrine?

F: I think that it reflects, again, personal views not necessarily in accordance with what we find in the Scriptures relative to the matter. II Nephi addresses the question, I think, when the Lord says that all people are the same to Him and He specifically mentions Blacks and Whites as being equal.

M: Would your interpretation be that they would be treated unfairly because they're not given the priesthood, and that's in direct disagreement with II Nephi?

F: I would think so.

M: Yet, official doctrine is that they're cursed with the black skin, and as a result cannot hold a priesthood [position].

F: It's ironical that in the first days of the church there were Negroes who held the priesthood. This indicates to me that the doctrine, if such a thing did evolve, evolved later on, probably within the context of the early struggle of Negroes and in the context of the Civil War period, all of these things.

E: So, Mr. Flores, the arguments that you may have with church hierarchy on questions of ethnic and racial discrimination are based more on interpretations of church doctrine rather than church doctrine itself. Is that what you're saying?

F: I would think that would be a fair statement of the situation.

E: Mr. Flores, at any time during your trials and tribulations in these ethnic and racial related matters, have you ever seriously considered leaving the church?

F: Never. In fact, I think my committment to the church has been manifested more strongly within the last three years, which have been really the worst ones in my life in relationship to the church. Three of my sons have been on missions for the church and I've been sustaining them totally--I pay their expenses. The youngest son is leaving next week, so my committment to the church hasn't diminished at all because I have a very definite relationship with the church.

M: How much have these expenses amounted to?

F: Last year, while the oldest son was finishing his mission in Puerto Rico, my expenses for him were running \$450 a month, which is half my salary. Right now they're running \$250 a month.

M: Are they getting help from the Ward also?

F: No, sir.

M: You're supporting them totally?

F: Totally mine.

E: Mr. Flores, do your sons have the same degree of commitment to the church that you are exhibiting?

F: Yes. In fact, when I was disfellowshipped my twins were about ready to go. I asked them point blank if under the circumstances they were still willing to go. Without hesitation they said yes.

M: I'd like to get into the matter that led to your being disfellowshipped. What was the origin of the problems that led to the disbanding of the Seventh Ward?

F: In December of 1972 the Third Ward bishopric decided that they would move the congregation to the Douglas Street Chapel and share it with the Anglo Ward there.

M: The Third Ward was totally Mexican?

F: Yeah. They decided this and proceeded to ignore one of the basic tenents of church government as we find it in Doctrine and Covenants, and that is that nothing will be done in the church without the common consent of the members. They decided and they decided not to present it to the members for approval.

M: Who decided?

F: Third Ward bishopric. At that time several families decided that if that was the way things were going to go then they would move to the Seventh Ward. And about six or seven families moved to the Seventh Ward. The stake authorities started to pressure the Seventh Ward bishopric not to admit these families into fellowship any more. Now, you know, within the framework of the church it is divided in geographical areas and each member is asked to go to

the Ward where he lives. But you also know that there are exceptions that people can and do go to Wards wherein they do not live. Well, two families from the Seventh Ward were going to the Third Ward and they were permitted to go. In fact, they're membership was transferred, under instructions from the stake president, to the Third Ward; but they would not do the same for these families that decided to go to Seventh Ward. We took the position, in the Seventh Ward, that they were members of the church and as such they were welcome.

M: Were you in the bishopric then?

F: No.

M: What was your position at that time?

F: My position was a Sunday School teacher. But I was very vocal in the priesthood meeting. In fact I put it up as a motion at the priesthood meeting that we accept these brethren without reservations. And the vote was unanimous with an abstention. But the stake authorities took a very dim view of this.

M: What was their position?

F: That these people were violating the rule of the church and that the Seventh Ward bishopric was in fact acquiescing and violating the rule by accepting these people. Then the Third Ward bishopric decided to hold a bishops' court to try one of the people that moved over here. At this time I drafted a telegram for the bishop's signature and we sent it to Salt Lake City, asking that Salt Lake City intervene and halt the proceedings and make an investigation of the whole situation. They did halt the proceeding and they sent one of the general authorities, Marion G. Romeny, to make an investigation. I use the word "investigation" within quotation

marks, because it was no investigation. He came and met over at the Hilton Inn with the stake leadership. He called some of the people involved. He called me. From my interview with him, he wasn't looking for facts. He was trying to confirm his own opinion on the matter.

E: Which was?

F: That these people were in violation of church policy and that, in fact, they were insubordinate. He came and he went, and that was in July of '72, and the matter continued. I mean, nothing more was done. The status quo remained.

M: The seven families continued attending the Seventh Ward?

F: Continued attending and at a stake conference on April the 29th they dissolved the Ward.

M: Was that a surprise?

F: Nobody knew about it. The bishop didn't know about it--the bishop was my brother. Nobody knew about it. They didn't ask for consent, again in violation of church procedure. That same day they summoned my brother before a High Council court and he was disfellowshipped. The day he was disfellowshipped, I was summoned before a court. Two weeks later I was disfellowshipped, the charges being insubordination.

M: What is the meaning of being disfellowshipped?

F: You cannot participate in any of the church activities. You cannot talk in a church meeting, you cannot attend a priestly meeting, you cannot hold any position in the church, you cannot partake of the sacrament.

E: So it's a quasi-excommunication?

F: Yes.

E: Mr. Flores, what effect did this have on your personal life?
Was it a highly disruptive event? Did you take it in stride?
What effect did it have on you?

F: Well, I took it in stride only because I felt that it was my obligation to those who for a long time hadn't believed in what we were doing--that it was right, that it was proper, that it was just. The first few days were hell in that I was torn between my realization of what can happen under certain circumstances even within the church. Essentially I felt that my dream for a better day for my people had vanished within the framework of the church.

E: Do you still feel that way?

F: Yes, with certain reservations. I think that within the area there's certainly not much future. The only thing we can do is try to hold on to what we have.

E: Mr. Flores, within the southwestern United States or the western United States, is there any other city that has the size of the Mexican Mormon population that El Paso does?

F: San Antonio.

E: About how many could you say off hand?

F: San Antonio should have about 2,000.

E: About twice as large [as El Paso]. Any other city?

F: Phoenix, certainly southern California, Los Angeles.

E: Have you ever been in correspondence with any leaders in any of these communities?

F: No.

M: Is the Mexican Mormon community in these other places aware of what happened here?

- F: Yes. I think the whole church is aware of what happened here. Unfortunatley it has been used to intimidate the other Mexican communities into total submission, I believe, to whatever the church authorities determine. In fact, I know that the church's policy at the present is to do away with the Mexican churches as such. That is, they're looking for integration, if integration is the right term. I think this is a policy that is doomed to failure.
- E: Is it your belief that this integration would take the form of having minimal amounts of Mexican Americans dispersed in predominantly Anglo Mormon churches?
- F: Yes. I think that has been the experience. In fact, I don't see that any Mexican Mormon within the framework of the Anglo Ward would really amount to much in the context of leadership positions and policy making determination.
- M: How big was this Seventh Ward when it was disbanded?
- F: It had about 450.
- M: How did the congregation feel about the issue?
- FL [They felt so] strongly that we lost, I'd say, 70% of them.
- M: They stopped coming? They're inactive now?
- F: They're inactive.
- M: Was there any time when a vote of consent or non-consent was taken in the entire congregation about the issue?
- F: The day the Ward was dissolved I called some key people, and we held a meeting illegally because there was no Ward organization. The consensus was [that] this was a dastardly deed. There was no justification for it, and in fact, this was the [most] extreme use of raw power that we had ever witnessed.

M: Was there any precedent for this? Had they done anything like this elsewhere?

F: I'm sure they have, otherwise they wouldn't have done it; but that doesn't determine that the action was correct. Because when anything is done without the consent of those involved it's in violation of one of the cardinal principles of church government. I think it is one of the balances that the Lord uses in determining [how] the church government will function.

M: You had a meeting with the leadership or members of the leadership of the Ward. Was there any way to measure opinion in the entire congregation? Was that ever done?

F: Well, my wife and I contacted several people. We tried to more or less keep them, you know. I'll tell you about one particular family. This man and his family were converted, I'd say, three years prior to this. He had been living in the Third Ward, but in the last year or so had moved to the area of the Seventh Ward. In fact, he lived in the public housing in Ysleta because we met at the Ysleta Women's Club. He moved over there so he could attend that Ward. So I went to see him, oh, I'd say about a month after this happened, and he was so incensed about it that he went into his bedroom--we were sitting in his living room--and he came back with a pistol in his hand. He said, "Tell me, which one of those three do you want me to kill?" I told him, "What would that accomplish?"

M: He was serious?

F: He was dead serious.

M: Which were the three that he was referring to?

F: The stake presidency.

M: Who was the stake presidency at that time?

F: Harold Turley was the stake president, Harold Mullen was counsellor, Ivy Romeny was the other counsellor.

M: Have you ever mentioned this incident to any of them?

F: I mentioned it to President Mullen and he just looked at the floor, didn't say anything about it.

E: Mr. Flores, I'm not trying to put words in your mouth. If this summary of what I perceive of your perceptions to be is incorrect, please tell me. But in effect, aren't you saying that there's acquiescence to discrimination and racism in the hierarchy of the Mormon Church?

F: Not only is there acquiescence; I think I've seen and heard statements--very strong statements--indicating that this is the case.

M: What have the relations been, since the disbanding of the Seventh Ward between Mexicans of that congregation who continue to be active and the leadership of the stake?

F: They've been very labored I think. I think essentially they have lost the confidence of the people. Not only that; I feel that between certain individuals and the stake presidency, there's definite animosity. This is tragic.

M: The people who stayed active--what Ward do they belong to now?

F: Third Ward. You see, at the time we were given the choice of either going to the Ward within whose boundaries we resided or going to the Third Ward. The vast majority of the people made the determination to go to Third Ward even though the distance was great and conditions in the Third Ward were not exactly optimal.

M: What Ward was the other choice?

F: Going to the Anglo Wards within whose jurisdictions they lived.

But I think only one family chose that, and after a few months they're back [in the Third Ward] again.

M: Where was the Seventh Ward located?

F: At the Ysleta Women's Club.

M: You didn't have a chapel?

FL That's another thing. We had \$30,000, more or less, plus we had paid for the land. The preliminary plans were already laid out for the construction of a chapel at the time the Ward was disbanded, and the church took custody of the monies we had.

M: What were the feelings about that?

F: Pretty strong.

M: Do those feelings remain strong? What has happened to that land and that money?

F: The land is still there. They gave me a personal promise that they would not dispose of the monies. Now, whether that promise means anything or not, I don't know.

M: These were Ward funds?

F: Ward funds.

M: Raised by the Ward members from what activities?

F: Suppers, personal contributions, all kinds of activities.

M: Leading toward the building of that church?

F: The building of the chapel.

E: Even if the funds aren't disposed of, to whose benefit are they being held in escrow?

F: They will accrue to our benefit, if the promise means anything, eventually.

E: In what ways would they accrue to your benefit?

F: That we would be able to build a chapel in the future.

E: Would conditions change?

F: When conditions are proper. Now, what they mean by proper conditions is anybody's guess.

E: When perhaps these attitudes of rebelliousness simmer down?

F: Probably.

E: Mr. Flores, we want to thank you very much for a most enlightening interview.

F: I appreciate the opportunity.

E: Thank you very much.

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M: This is an addendum to the interview. I want to ask you a question about your coming back into the church, Mr. Flores. Could you tell us the circumstances surrounding that?

F: I appealed the proceedings and the outcome of the trial to the first presidency immediately after [I was disfellowshipped], detailing my feelings on the matter. They never answered my appeal. About a month later, President Turley called me and informed me that my appeal had been denied. What the grounds for the denial were I'll never know. For almost two years I was disfellowshipped. In February of '75 I had an interview with the stake presidency at which time I asked them to state specifically what instructions or what orders I had disobeyed in order for the accusation of insubordination to stand. Their answer was that it was because of the influence which I had over other people, an influence which caused the turmoil which resulted in my being disfellowshipped.

If I would make a statement that I was sorry, in fact that I had repented, they would be willing to reconsider my re-entering into the church. I told them that I didn't have anything to repent, and as far as I was concerned, they could just leave the matter as it was. A few months later they released President Turley. Incidentally, I think that the whole matter boils down to a personality conflict between President Turley and myself, and that not apart that Harold Mullen wants _____ as president of the stake. Then I held an interview with the new stake presidency in April of this year in which we went over the same thing. In fact, in this interview, one of the counsellors pointedly asked me what my brothers were doing in the church, what certain other individuals were doing in the church, insinuating that they were doing something or not doing what they ought to be doing; and it was because of me. I very strongly told them that the whole thing was immaterial to the matter at hand. What my family was doing was their affair and it had nothing to do with what we were discussing.

M: What was your family doing? What were the insinuations made?

F: The insinuations were that they were not doing their duty--and I use the word "duty" within quotation marks--because of my influence.

M: You mean they were not holding positions or they were holding positions but not carrying out their duties?

F: They were supposedly turning down positions and they were not doing their home teaching--those that ought to be doing it--all because of my influence, which is childish really. But I told them as such and the meeting ended by the president of the stake

indicating that he and I alone should get together. The following week he and I met together alone without his counsellors there. He said, "I'll be satisfied if you go before the High Council and make a statement to the effect that you're sorry for the contention you caused among the leadership of the church." I told him that I had no quarrel with such a statement, but I wasn't about to admit insubordination. So, I went before the Council maybe two weeks later, I don't recall, and made the statement. One or two of the members of the Council tried to revive the issue of insubordination and repentance, but the president stood his ground on what he had promised me, that this was all that would be required, and I was readmitted at that time.

E: Mr. Flores, as you realize, this country is entering its 200th birthday as a nation. I'd like to ask you a couple of questions with regard to your identity with things such as the American Revolution and the founding fathers of this country. Could you give some general opinions that you might have about this from the perspective of a Mexican American living in 1975?

F: Well, let me tell you, that as an American by choice since I am a naturalized citizen, I believe in the dream that made America possible. I believe in the justice of the struggle which the colonists made in order to free themselves from bondage. I mean, I believe in the American dream.

E: Mr. Flores, do you believe that Mexican Americans have the same opportunities that Anglo Americans have today?

F: No, they don't. But hopefully they will.

E: Have they been improved since the first year that you arrived in the United States?

F: I think that there's been a definite improvement. At least there's an awareness of the seriousness of the situation and I think remedial action is being taken on many fronts to correct the situation.

E: Once again, I thank you very much, sir.