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David L. Carrasco

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: David L. Carrasco
INTERVIEWER: Magdaleno Cisneros
PROJECT: Class Project
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Mr. David Carrasco was born in South El Paso and educated here at El Paso and attended the Texas College of Mines in 1943. He has taught at different levels. Mr. Carrasco had done a lot of work with the government, especially in the field of foreign relations in Latin America. He served on the Border Commission with Mr. Raymond Télles. Presently Mr. Carrasco is Executive Center Director of the El Paso Job Corps Center.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Mr. Carrasco's work with the U.S. Border Commission and his work in Latin America; current border issues and possible solutions for the future; Cd. Juárez-El Paso relations and problems faced by both cities.

Length of Interview: 1 hour
19 pages.

M: Today we are glad to have with us, Mr. David L. Carrasco, Center Director of the El Paso Job Corps Center.

C: I am very pleased to participate in this interview particularly because Mr. Magdaleno Cisneros asked me to cooperate with his efforts. My name is David Carrasco. I am the Director of the El Paso Job Corps Center. He asked me to give some of my background. I'll go through that briefly. I am a native of El Paso and I was born at 904 S. Tays Street. My father and mother are from the state of Chihuahua and it was as young people that they crossed the border into the United States and settled here in El Paso. I have two other brothers. So our family at one time was comprised of five persons. My two brothers are also involved in youth programs. One has been in the Peace Corps overseas for approximately ten years and my brother Miguel works with the Interior Department in Washington, D.C.

My background generally has been competitive athletics. As a young man I participated in sports at the high school and the college level. I became interested in teaching physical education and coaching. I had experience from elementary school coaching through the university level and to international sports. My main efforts now are to work in the Center here and to maintain its high and effective level of performance.

M: Mr. Carrasco, would you give us a little background on your education?

C: Certainly will; I was a student at Vilas elementary and then at El Paso High School. I graduated from the Texas College of Mines in 1943. Although in my last year there I was only participating in one or two

courses. I was the physical education teacher at Aoy Elementary School and then at Bowie High School and then I left El Paso to enter the armed forces and served in the United States Navy. I pursued a Master's degree in Education from the University of Maryland in College Park, Maryland and studied for a Doctorate in Education and completed all the required courses and passed the comprehensive examination. But like a lot of people, restless to move around, I never did complete the written requirement better known as the dissertation or thesis. In any event I have participated in education at all levels. I am particularly proud of my achievement in education and physical education in sports at the international level having spent some ten years in Latin America serving practically in all the capitals of Central and South America. I hope some day if the opportunity presents itself I will be able to complete my work in the doctoral program. I am not too sure at what university I'll be able to accomplish this because I will more than likely not be leaving El Paso to go back to the University of Maryland.

M: Mr. Carrasco, would you like to tell us about your employment history, particularly with the United States Commission for Border Development and Friendship?

C: Certainly Magdaleno. As I mentioned before, my interest is in teaching. With some skills in sports, I entered the field of physical education, and my specialty in coaching was generally in basketball. So following my discharge from the United States Navy and having married a girl from Maryland, I took a job teaching and coaching in Silver Spring which is in metropolitan Washington, actually a suburb of the nation's capital.

So from 1946 until 1964 we actually lived in Silverspring Maryland. During that time, as mentioned before, I was a teacher at the elementary school and junior high school, at Montgomery High School of Silverspring, Maryland. In 1955 I was appointed chairman of the Department of Physical Education and basketball coach at the American University and I remained there until 1964. In the summer beginning with 1959 I began to travel into Latin America through a program which is called American Abroad or American Specialist Program. Having developed an interest in working in Latin America in 1964, I resigned my position at the American University and entered the Peace Corps to serve as director of a Youth Development Program in Ecuador, South America. Prior to that, particularly in the summer as I mentioned with this program for American Specialist---I traveled through Central America and into South America and became very aware of the need for good representation by Spanish-speaking educators in the United States Department of State. Therefore in 1967 I resigned my position with the U.S. Peace Corps. I accepted a Foreign Service appointment and was assigned as the Olympic Attaché to work with the Department of State as the coordinator for the Olympic games. This I did in conjunction with the Mexican Organizing Committee for XIX Nineteenth Olympiad and also with the Mexican Olympic Committee. Having had prior experience in Foreign Service I really enjoyed my work, and became very well-acquainted with the mission of the Department of State. And I particularly became keen on the need to improve. What

I considered deteriorating relationships between the United States and México and therefore sought an appointment and received it with the U.S. Commission for Border Development and Friendship. Ambassador Raymond Télles, former mayor of El Paso and former ambassador to Costa Rica, was the chairman of the Commission. My assignment was Regional Director of the region which was located here in El Paso. Our territory encompassed several counties of New Mexico and several of the Big Bend counties in Texas. I really enjoyed my relationship with the U.S. Commission for Border Development and Friendship. Regrettably through the lack of funds and a misunderstanding of what our mission was, this commission met its demise and in late 1969 the commission was dissolved. This of course came as a big disappointment to all of us, particularly to the country of México because this was a binational commission, we had our counterparts in México. More than anything I believed that a misunderstanding as to the function of the commission particularly as it related to the Twin Plants. As you are aware, the Twin Plant concept has many enemies in the strong labor communities of our nation. And it was the members of Congress who had constituencies that are affiliated to labor, that lobbied to cut the funds for the continuation of the Border Commission. This, as I mentioned before, was a great disappointment because since that time, I feel that the relationship between the United States and México has further deteriorated. And there will be a need very soon for our nation to take some steps, whatever they may be, to bring about a closer understanding. I think here in El Paso we see evidence

on a daily basis that there is a void, a very strong void--the street-car problem is but one very minor example. The crossing of illegal drugs and narcotics, the illegal aliens entering into our country here. Many people that are unemployed from México come into the U.S. But these problems cannot be solved only by El Pasoans. They have to be solved by Washington, by our state representatives, by our local officials and their counterparts in México. So again my hope is that the Commission or a similar representative body will soon be formed so that we can work to alleviate these increasing problems of misunderstanding and mistrust between our two cities and our two nations.

M: Mr. Carrasco, you mentioned several incidents in relation to your appointment to the U.S. Commission for Border Development and Friendship. Could you give us some especially tragic or comic incidents that you encountered in your work there?

C: Yes. You mean how this appointment came about?

M: Yes.

C: Well, at the end of the Olympic program for example, the Olympic program had wound down and as a foreign service officer I was going to be reassigned. I had the option of returning to the Peace Corps and going back into South America. In speaking to Ambassador Raymond Télles about my future, he suggested that I give consideration to coming into the commission. I was particularly pleased, Magdaleno, that this could come about because it gave me an opportunity to return to my hometown. And as I mentioned before I had been away from El Paso since 1943.

Of course, my family to a large extent still lived here--cousins, aunts and others. My parents were in El Paso, although they had moved away but had returned. So this really was an excellent opportunity. The job was somewhat tailor-made for me, because I knew the border. I spoke English and Spanish. I had many friends here. I had a strong background of international affairs. I was familiar with the workings of the State Department having been attached to the embassy not only in México but in other embassies throughout Latin America. I had a strong working knowledge of the foreign office, how the foreign office operates in México. I had close ties and many friends in México City and in other cities in México. And with my knowledge of competitive athletics and as you know physical education is a big thing in México, the job was sort of tailor-made for a person of my background. By and large the commission, as I mentioned before brought new hope to the possibility of solving numerous problems that only can be worked out, in my opinion, binationally. It's impossible to hope that the problems in Juárez and El Paso can be treated separately. We breathe the same air, by and large we cross back and forth time and time again in a given week. We eat the same food. Many U.S. people go over there. Many Mexican people come over here. We have, particularly those of us who are Mexican-American, our heritage in México. The Commission is the proper approach, whether it is the old commission or a new one, to bring forth the solution to these problems which I keep mentioning.

M: Could you give some incidents you were involved in, people you worked with?

C: Is this in the Commission?

M: Yes, sir.

C: Specifically some of the things I took a lot of pride in is in the area of libraries at interchange educational programs, in the area of educational conferences, in the area of musical interchanges, also we had a lot of sports exchange.

In the Commission we were always advised when dignitaries were going to be here. So I was in the position to know and take full advantage of the visit of these dignitaries. I took great pride in personally being responsible in the transfer of a van. This van was equipped with the latest and most up-to-date visual aids, such as movie cameras, projectors, screens, tape recorders. This equipment and this van was very expensive--upwards of fifty thousand dollars--all this was presented by Mrs. Johnson, wife of the president, to Mrs. Díaz Ordaz, the wife of the president of México. I was involved, and while neither Mrs. Johnson or Mrs. Díaz Ordaz were personally present at the border, they did have personal representatives. I was very thrilled. The purpose of this equipment and this van was to support a "pet" program of the wife of the president of México and that was to work in rural areas with children with physical defects. So this is one of the most meaningful yet less heralded type of activity I was involved in with the U.S. Commission.

M: By that, I guess you mean you were involved in a lot of important activities. Could you tell us about some of them, and what were the attitudes of officials on both sides of the border?

C: Generally the attitudes on both sides of the border of officials were a great deal of interest and co-operation. Sometimes the role of a federal

official on the local level is misunderstood. For me it wasn't too much of a problem because I am from El Paso. But sometimes and understandably so, officials and local citizens are not quite understanding of why an outsider, in this case a bureaucrat from Washington, is here in El Paso to give direction or emphasis to a problem that is local; for me it wasn't too much that way. For example, when we had one of the projects that was interesting, was during the 16th of September, we had a strong interchange of students, elementary students from Las Cruces and from El Paso and they were accompanied by their teachers to select schools in Juárez and had beautiful programs of dancing, music and poetry --then these schools were reciprocated by sending their representatives to schools here, some of the schools in the area of El Paso. Again these programs, while not involving people of national scope or international scope, they do involve the youth. I took a lot of interest and a lot of pleasure in working with the youth programs which is of course the career I am more concerned with and the work I am more involved with.

M: Mr. Carrasco, you previously said or referred to your work as having a lot to do with the Twin Plant concept here in El Paso and Juárez; could you elaborate on that?

C: Well you see, the twin plants depend upon where you are sitting. As I mentioned before the labor movement or labor unions in our nation are very anti- Twin Plants. Because, in effect, when a twin plant is established a lot of the work on clothing, for example, televisions, electronic equipment and other manufacturing say shoes, gloves and all types of clothing is finished across the border. The Union people

see this as a denial (fo) job opportunities for Americans. We recognize that this may be so and there is a lot to that concept. On the other hand, a lot of this work is done in other nations, not only México. So some people take the attitude that if there is going to be the shipping of goods unfinished as they may be, to another country, it might as well be here along the border. Because a lot of the earnings of the people who will work in these plants, will be returned and spent here in El Paso, if we are only thinking in terms of El Paso. The thing about Twin Plants is that it's not really a twin plant, it's a very big plant in Juárez, and a little plant in El Paso, a little warehouse really. So it does not create a lot of jobs for El Pasoans. What it does create is a small number of jobs for El Pasoans and a large number of jobs for the people in Juárez. My personal feeling is that, to a large extent this is desirable if in fact these goods are going to be shipped to foreign countries and foreign markets, it might as well be right here in El Paso and then to Juárez. The goods are received and warehoused here in El Paso, moved across the border, then work is completed and goods or equipment or whatever it may be are returned to El Paso and packed or whatever. It may then be shipped to Eastern and Northern markets.

M: Mr. Carrasco, it is estimated that some two hundred thousand people are dependent on money from the Twin Plants in Juárez. Could you give us some more figures on the number of plants and other figures relating to the twin plants? How many plants are there in Juárez?

C; Magdaleno, I am not up to date really on how the program is developed. I only know what I read in the paper and hear. I think that from a slow start and after some serious obstacles that the twin plant concept has gotten well underway and has a good hold and I think those that are

interested in this concept can work well through whatever means are available to them--lobbying in the bill in Washington--that they can maintain this program as one that will be of economical service to the border cities. But there is and remains a strong movement on the part of labor to introduce legislation that would kill these bills. I know that there are twin plants along the major cities, from Tijuana to Matamoros, from San Diego to Brownsville.

M: Mr. Carrasco, you were involved in other things other than the twin plants and your work with the Border Commission. Could you tell us about some of the things you did and the places you worked at?

C: Well as I mentioned before we had educational programs, we had sports exchange. Specifically in education we organized several conferences at the University of Texas at El Paso dealing with accreditation. A youngster who reached a certain level of education in México could enter the same level here in the Southwest or anywhere along the border, say in Arizona or California and still be given credit for the majority of those courses that he took; so this was a conference on accreditation. We had a conference on Bilingual Education, continuing education and higher education. In Sports exchange we did a lot in promoting clinics, instructional clinics in a variety of sports. In immigration we worked very closely, you may also recall along another line, Project Intercept which certainly brought tensions to border cities. While our Commission was not directly involved in the decision to place these restrictions on cars coming across, the search procedures we were very much involved in interpreting what was going on to the general public. So our projects, Magdaleno, generally extended from small ones dealing with youngsters from Juárez and other cities along the border coming to cities in the U.S. for educational exchange, to large planning sessions in Washington D.C., in México City and other border cities

such as El Paso and Mexicali and Tijuana, Brownsville and so forth, where major decisions were being made as to commerce, immigration, air pollution, employment, policies--all of these matters were discussed and solutions were being sought.

M: Could you elaborate on the bilingual program?

C: Well I think the bilingual-bicultural program along the border, particularly here in El Paso is one where the need for it is really tailor-made. It's really pathetic, in my opinion, the number of people in high positions of government, high positions of education, medicine, administrators, that are not capable of speaking Spanish. They as Anglos are living in the United States and they are property owners and they are Americans here. The true sense of the word "American" is misused, because people that live in México, in Latin America, in South America, are also Americans, because we all live in the same hemisphere. But that's not the way the word is used although people in South American countries do not refer to people in the U.S. by the name of "Americans", they call them U.S. citizens because they think of themselves as Americans also. So what we are saying is that there exists in El Paso those people that unfortunately really feel that they need not learn the Spanish language. I think it's a cultural misconception, as to being the owners of the land and the determinators of the culture. Of course, when you speak of bicultural, bilingual, you really mean more than just being able to speak a language, it's an attitude, a feeling, an understanding; it encompasses the art, the music, the history the customs, the mores of, in this case, México. I am a strong endorser of good programs of bilingual education. I know I'm not giving it the wide scope that is required here, but in the short time that we have, I certainly endorse that. I know that Mexican people will go out of their country way to try and learn English.

- M: Mr. Carrasco there is a big controversy over people that work here in El Paso and go home to Juárez in the evenings. Could you give us your opinion on this problem and what are the attitudes of federal officials, and businessmen on both sides of the border?
- C: I think that in the long run, something needs to be done about this problem, the so-called greencarder. The term "greencarder" is used because originally the card was a green color. The ideal solution lies in the need to provide housing for all the people from México that have applied to become legal residents. When you apply for a green card and receive one, what it does in fact, is make you a legal alien, a legal resident of the U.S. There are not enough hospital facilities, or schools, or transportation, there are not enough over-all services, if all the holders of the green cards would come to the U.S. and live here--the problems would be almost multitudinous; but there needs to be a plan so that when a person does in fact receive their resident papers and become legal residents they be required to reside here. I know that because of the distance it's easy for a person to be holders of these cards and go back to México. It's more economical for them; the wage here is not that high that they are capable of earning and the other thing is that the families are large. So naturally while the man may have a green card, perhaps his wife or children may not, there are grandparents and other members of the family that do not have these cards so it's a very complicated problem. But I think that by and large the desirable solution is to work towards requiring residence in the country for which the card is issued.
- M: Mr. Carrasco, you are in a good position to discuss the job market. Could you describe how you see it and unions, is there a need for them, and union attitudes towards "greencarders"?

C: Having spent quite a few years in the east and seeing the wages of the members of the unions, Magdaleno, I can't help but to have some positive feelings towards being a member of a labor union or a union because I think there are many benefits. The concept of being a member of a union or unionism, I think is very sound. Unfortunately those that are in command and in power in the unions have misused some of this power, thereby giving, to some extent, a bad name to the unions. That in itself is not unique because the state of our government at this time, going back to Watergate, shows that there is a lot of I can even use the word "corruption." I am not using the word corruption as I talk about the unions, I am just saying that it appears to me that there is a misuse of power in the unions. Here in El Paso the union movement is rather limited. Being in the area of job training, seems to me that to enroll one of our graduates into the apprentices program and later into the union programs is a very desirable thing. The reason why the unions have not flourished in the border cities is because to a large extent the availability of workers from across the border. It's a matter of supply and demand; the supply is much greater than the demand, consequently the employer can be choosy as to what wages he is going to offer for the effort made by the worker. It's not that easy a problem. Again it's very complex. I know of no border city here or in other nations where the matter of employment is easy to find a solution. Take for example, Bolivia and Argentina, or Argentina or Uruguay or Argentina and Paraguay where the standard of living varies; the country that has the highest standard of living has the greatest influx of illegal aliens. This is the case in this border and not in the Canadian border.

- M: Mr. Carrasco, lately there has been a lot of talk about the lack of public transportation between El Paso and Juárez. Could you give us some background about this problem and your experience with it and what could be the solution?
- C: The lack of streetcars and other forms of transportation between El Paso and Juárez is typical of what takes place in the effort to solve international problems on all border cities between these two countries. In our nation here we are in a position to have great input to solve problems that besiege our citizens without going into the national level; regrettably in México the solution or the authority generally comes from the top down. The wishes of the local citizens are slowly listened to, slowly heard. The matter of transportation or lack of it is very serious for the working man here in this city and within the city and of course across the border for tourism and for people that need to go back and forth. The city, county, and state government officials and even those at the national level have to take immediate measures to solve this matter of lack of transportation for our citizens here in our community, particularly for the working man. For transportation back and forth across the border it's going to require that the Mexican government give the "green light". We hear and we are told that the reason why the streetcars are not running is because the president of México has to sign a document. It seems inconceivable that a matter of some streetcars crossing back and forth require the signature of a president.
- M: Mr. Carrasco, there is a controversy in the United States and particularly in the southwest about illegal aliens. The claim is made that illegal aliens take jobs from Americans. Could you elaborate on this controversy?

C: My views on the problem of illegal aliens lead me to conclude that something needs to be done. I am not saying it should be curtailed, or aliens should be deported, or incarcerated. I am thinking more in terms of an understanding between nations. I am not for the illegal alien, I'll say that. I think that anyone crossing any border of the world needs to have proper documentation. And yet when you travel into certain areas in México and other nations and you see the poverty and lack of jobs and opportunities, I can fully understand why a person with family responsibilities would cross the border and take such a chance. The other point that is not frequently emphasized is the fact that the employer is, in my opinion, equally as guilty if not more so because the illegal alien problem could be pretty much curtailed if the employer would not provide a job without checking the documents. What happens is that the employer, knowing that he can save money, wage money, will hire the illegal alien. So it's complex, a sad situation; the solution is not easy, but we need to work on it; and it can only be solved unilaterally because for one nation to put up certain restrictions without consulting the other nation will not attack the problem in a positive way.

M: Mr. Carrasco, I am almost through but before I move on to my last two questions, are there any problems here on the border that we have not discussed that you would like to mention?

C: I think the problem that is going to need some attention is the environmental problem. There is also of course the problem of illegal flow of drugs which needs to be solved and attacked on a very high level. The environmental problem is, of course, acute and I think that if the nations of the United States and México, work cooperatively and work truthfully with each other that we can successfully attack these problems. I'd say

the key problem right now would be environmental; protection of it, clean air, health problems, the illegal flow of drugs, pretty generally are the key concerns and of course, employment and economics also enter the picture.

M: Mr. Carrasco, there has been made the allegation that high government officials in some countries are involved in the trafficking of illegal drugs. You as a member of the U.S. Border Commission had contact with many foreign officials. Could you confirm or did you know of anyone of these persons?

C: The problem really is that we are in a position to attack small-time traffickers; there is no question in my mind that if proper steps were to be taken to curtail the drugs, illegal drugs at source, that would be a giant step towards eradicating this problem of drugs. I think that there is one problem that must be attacked, I am speaking now as a youth leader and as an educator, and that is the illegal use of drugs by young people. I think it's demoralizing and I think it's going to decay the fiber of our youth. Unless some steps are taken-and El Paso is just in the right location to be affected more than any other city along the border-our youth are subjected to strong availabilities of these drugs.

M: Would you say there are high government officials involved in the trafficking of drugs or narcotics?

C: As I mentioned, I don't know them by name, I just say that there needs to be someone that is rich, and in authority, that is arranging for the trafficking of these drugs, otherwise it could not be done successfully. So law enforcement has to be involved, education on the part of the schools, churches and communities, it has to be an on-going thing. But to answer your question specifically, I am not knowledgeable of any by name; but as I moved around, I have strong reason to believe that people involved

in making millions of dollars take a part in this matter of illegal flow of drugs.

M: Mr. Carrasco, you as a Mexican-American, could you give me your opinion or attitude toward the word "Chicano"?

C: Well the thing about the word Chicano, I remembered it being used as a young boy here. Not much was said about it. I remembered one of the heroes that we had was a good fighter, good with his fists, ran fast-- he was called "El Chicano". I thought he was a great guy. But when I was overseas and back into the U.S. in 1969, then the word Chicano became very popular. I heard a man say that he could not qualify to be called a Chicano because he wasn't born in the U.S. he was born on the other side of the border. To me the word Chicano is not of a place where the person was born, or whether he is necessarily a Mexican-American, I think a Chicano is a state of mind. The true sense of the word, I think what it means is that a person is aware that there are injustices, that people are deprived of equal opportunities, that there needs to be a better distribution of opportunity and a chance to make a living, to advance, to have the necessities of life and even the niceties of life. If a person is involved in that struggle and has an attitude that defines the need to provide all these things which I mentioned, then I think he could classify himself as a Chicano.

M: What is your attitude towards the Chicano Movement and what do you feel are their problems here on the border?

C: Well, I think like any other movement it needs to be professionalized, it needs direction, it needs financing. As I mentioned before I think that a person who is in the movement, is a person that has mutual feelings towards equal opportunities, enhanced working possibilities, and better education. So if there is going to be a movement that means a union of

people that feel the same way about many things, be it Christian Movement, be it--well there is other organizations--but whatever it be it needs to be provided with strong leadership, it needs to be using the word, again professionalized. I am talking about bringing people into the organization that are capable, that have experience, that have accomplishments, that are involved in the political spectrum, are involved in all phases of our daily life. And I think we need to define the goals. And most of all I think for a movement to be effective it has to be non-violent.

M: Mr. Carrasco, in the same area, one of the major problems of Chicanos is inadequate housing, also the lack of summer jobs for youth. Could you comment on these problems?

C: I think there is nothing as backbreaking as inadequate housing, because what it does is destroy the strong base that is necessary to bring up a young boy or girl. I visit some of the homes of our students and I'm heartbroken to see the conditions in which they live and the poverty which exists. So by and large, it is very difficult to think in terms of opportunities for success because with poor housing you have poor health, poor nutrition, disease. You not only have physical disease but emotional disease, and mental problems come from poor housing and poor homes, small living quarters, and inadequate plumbing, and inadequate heating, and substandard drainage; and all of these things just make it impossible for youth to flourish. So I think this is a real problem we face in our community here and we need to take steps, whatever they may be. A young man or girl is affected in a very serious way and an image of poverty comes forth that just devitalizes the energy and the ambition to do well--so housing is definitely a problem. The matter of summer jobs has to be

given top consideration. The youth has to be in the position to make money. I think that you can equate the level of education with the level of employment, be it the Mexican-American, Chicano, whatever. I have seen this as a definite factor in many cities where I lived, nations where I visited. Opportunities for education--the higher the level of skill and the command of the language, command of writing and reading skills, awareness of current events and the environment in which a person lives--is going to enhance his opportunities for employment. I think the nation should make funds available to train youth. The Job Corps, I think is a fine example. In addition we have youngsters coming out of school for summer vacation who should not go idle. The schools should seek funds to provide continuing education or school days of 365 days of the year. Without the funds for summer employment, it's going to be a pretty hot summer. More important what is going to happen is that the learning capabilities of the youngster, if they are not in school and if they are not working, I think it's regressive to go out on vacation and just lay idle for two or three months. So as far as your question is specifically jobs for Mexican-American youth, I think that money should be made available for all youth; and certainly because the greatest need in jobs in El Paso is for Mexican-Americans and the opportunity for jobs for Mexican-Americans is much less than for other youth, I think greater emphasis should be given to providing jobs for Mexican-Americans.