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Interview no. 292

Graciela Olivares

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Graciela Olivárez
INTERVIEWER: Sarah E. John
PROJECT: _____
DATE OF INTERVIEW: August 19, 1976
TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Former New Mexico State Planning Officer.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Information on the proposed Anapra, New Mexico port of entry issue and her involvement in it; the proposed Border Commission; the Border Mayors Conference; the Chicano Movement; the Women's Movement.

30 minutes; 13 pages.

This is an oral history interview with Dr. Grace Olivárez, of the State Planning Office in Santa Fe, New Mexico, August 19, 1976. Interviewing is Sarah John.

J: To begin with Dr. Olivárez, can you tell us how you became the State Planning Officer?

O: I was asked by Governor Jerry Apodaca on January 16 if I would be interested in the job. He pointed out that it didn't pay what I was earning, and that if I couldn't take it would I recommend three other women that I thought might be able to handle the job. I did recommend one woman; and then I went home and I thought about it for three days, and then decided that the job was so exciting that I would take the \$8,000 cut and commute, and take it. So I assumed the responsibilities on February 19, 1975.

J: I'd like to ask you a general question on the Anapra Port of Entry issue. Why does New Mexico want the Anapra Port of Entry?

O: Well, I'm not sure that it was New Mexico per se that wanted the port of entry. There were some people, some individuals, that wanted the port of entry for a very legitimate reason. New Mexico is the only border state with México that doesn't have a full-service port of entry and it is the only border state that doesn't have international airline service. So in spite of the fact that we share a 200 mile border with México, we really don't have the relations because we are lacking a full-service port of entry. Whoever did the planning on the New Mexico side didn't take into consideration that on the Mexican side it was only a few miles down from Juárez; and although the planning on our side of the border was done very adequately, it only took into consideration our needs and didn't take into consideration the

problems of the Mexican side of the border. The reason that they want it is because we don't have a full-service port of entry.

J: One of the arguments against this could be that there is not a large border city on the New Mexico/México border. Besides this fact, do you feel it would be reasonable to have this port of entry?

O: At that location?

J: At any location along your border.

O: We need a full-service port of entry. Right now the only thing we have is Columbus with Palomas, and as you know that's not a very well-developed area. However, now that the port is open for 24 hours, we are working on the possibility of making that a full-service port; and I think that once we do that, automatically the area will grow. So, I think we need a full-service port. The fact remains that there is only one major city in New Mexico and it's not near the border. So, if we are going to wait until we have a major city [on the border] we will never have a port of entry.

J: Could you please trace your involvement in the Anapra issue?

O: I was asked by former Governor Bruce King to serve on the New Mexico-México Border Commission about three years ago. When I agreed to serve on the Commission, I noticed that one of the major projects for the formation of the Commission was to get the Port of Anapra open. That's when I became familiar with the fact that New Mexico did not have a port of entry; I was fairly new in the state at that time. There was a special task force appointed from the Commission whose responsibility was to get the port open. After a series of meetings

I became aware that there was a development plan, that contacts had been made with Juárez, with Chihuahua, with the Governor of Chihuahua, and that the opening of the port was a very serious matter with the former administration. As I looked at it, it looked very exciting, that the plans had been done very adequately and the right contacts had been made, until I realized that it was not a state to state matter but an international matter between two countries. That's when I suggested that they needed to touch base with our Secretary of State and México at the Mexican federal district level, which they attempted to do. I don't know what ever happened, but we never got the port approved on the Mexican side.

J: Do you know what the policy of the Mexican government was concerning this port?

O: I think that eventually their policy was that they could not justify constructing identical facilities to those that exist in Juárez at the present time a few miles down the road. They don't have that kind of money and they didn't feel that it was justified. Although it would relieve the pressure and the masses in the Juárez-El Paso area, nevertheless there wasn't enough justification to ask the Mexican government to invest as much money as was required to really construct duplicate facilities a few miles down the road.

J: Do you perhaps know the policy that the Chihuahua state government had towards this?

O: At that time from my understanding, they were all in favor of it, the Chihuahua people were; but México has a centralized form of government, and it's not what the governors want, it is what the President wants.

J: Do you know the general feeling of Juárez merchants in regards to opening another port? Were they in favor or against this port being opened?

O: I'm not sure about the merchants. I know that there were some industrialists who were eager to get that industrial park developed on both sides of the border because it would have benefited some of the Juárez industrialists. I don't know what the merchants', the ordinary business person's view was.

J: Does Governor Apodaca have any policy towards this issue at this time?

O: Towards the Port of Anapra?

J: Right.

O: I don't think he has one at the present time. He has other priorities, and Anapra is at least not in the top 10 priorities that we have for the State. Besides that, the Governor has already met with President-elect López Portillo and with some of the members of the PRI, and I think they have indicated to him that at this time the Mexican government doesn't have the port as one of their priority items either. So we're not really investing any time, effort, or energy in the port.

J: Do you feel, or does the State of New Mexico perhaps feel, that El Paso has blocked the efforts in the past to open this Anapra Port of Entry?

O: I think there's a general feeling among the people who have been involved in border relations that not El Paso per se, but Texas blocks any attempts at New Mexico establishing any kind of

relations, on a commercial or industrial basis, with Chihuahua.

If you would ask us to prove it, we'd be hard-pressed to come up with the evidence. But the general feeling and attitude of the New Mexican is that if were it not for Texas, we would have better facilities.

J: I'd like to ask you about the proposed Border Commission that came from the Border Mayors Conference back in February.

O: No, there's two; you are talking about two different projects. The Border Commission was not proposed by the mayors. The Border Commission, which is known as the Title V Commission, resulted from an amendment that was introduced to the Economic Development Act by Representative Jim Wright of Texas. As you know, he had been one of the strongest advocates for federal attention to the border problems and to border areas, as has been State Representative Dave Finney, also from Texas. Apparently Representative Wright in the House and Senator Montoya in the Senate were able to get an amendment to the Economic Development Regional Planning Act that would permit regional planning units to be established along the border. This would include the counties bordering with México in the four state area. The Border Mayors Conference is interested in having some kind of clout with the Federal Government, and the Border Mayors Conference is limited to mayors from incorporated cities that are contiguous to the border with México. This leaves New Mexico out, because we don't have an incorporated city right on the border. But the problems are there whether you're incorporated or not, and this is one of the reasons why I was so vocal at the Border Mayors Conference. The

way they were lining it up, they were completely leaving New Mexico out, other than for Las Cruces. So we're talking about the Border Mayors Conference, which is one thing, and the Border Commission, which involves border counties along the border.

J: This border commission is proposed at this time, it isn't a reality as yet.

O: That's right. It's been proposed, but it's not been designated by Commerce.

J: If this were to become a reality, what would New Mexico like to get out of this Border Commission? What are they looking for?

O: Attention to the problems along the counties that border with Chihuahua that are created strictly from proximity to the Border. For example, if Deming gets an influx of children from Chihuahua coming into the public school system, obviously New Mexico residents should not be responsible for the education of children from Chihuahua. But by the same token, the feeling of the Deming residents is that these kids are going to come back as adults anyway, so we might as well educate them in the English language in our schools; because we're going to get them either as undocumented workers or as legal aliens, so it's cheaper in the long run to educate them. In that instance, because it wouldn't be fair to get the New Mexico taxpayers to finance the education of these children, we would want to go to the Border Commission, to the Federal Government, for help for the Deming School System, to subsidize the Deming School System, so they can educate the children from Chihuahua. By the same token, if you've got an influx of undocumented workers and a shortage of

housing, and the shortage is caused by the undocumented worker, we would want the Border Commission or the Federal Government to help those border counties with housing for these undocumented workers as long as they were been hired by New Mexico businessmen. I'm not saying that it's right or wrong, I'm just saying it's a fact. So we would want some kind of relief from the Federal Government for problems that the border counties are suffering from, strictly from the fact that they are on the border. Let's say that Doña Ana County wanted to improve their irrigation system in order to increase their crop production. Obviously, it has nothing to do with being near the border. So in that instance we would want The Four Corners Regional Commission to help Doña Ana County with their irrigation project. So what I'm saying is that those counties have problems by being close to the border, but then there are other problems that they have just by being counties. So we would want two separate sources of funding to help border counties. That's what we would want out of it.

J: I'd like to ask you another general question. I'd like your personal view of the Chicano Movement. What are your feelings toward this movement?

O: Well, I've been involved in what is now known as the Chicano Movement. It wasn't known as the Chicano Movement when I got involved; it was known as the Mexican American Movement.

J: Is it the same thing in your eyes?

O: Well, it varies from region to region and it varies from generation to

generation. My goal has always been to bring my people up to a level where they can make a choice--if they want to be middle-class or if they want to remain the way they are. But I want to bring them up to a level where they can make a choice and know what it is that they're choosing. I'm disappointed because in many instances I find that the Chicano Movement...for example, the other day somebody accused me of not being a "typical Mexican." I asked them why, and they said because I had a good job, and I lived in the Heights and I had been successful. This means to me that a typical Mexican is one who fails, and I don't agree with that. So in many instances when we try to bring the Chicano out of the poverty situation we're accused of being capitalists, of having been absorbed by the system (whatever that is), and that's the kind of movement I don't understand. I understood that the movement was to give all Chicanos their Constitutional rights, to bring them to a level where they could make a choice (if they wanted to continue living the way they were living, they would have that choice), to bring them to a level where they could, if they wanted, go on to school, get an education and become whatever they wanted to become. The argument is that if you do that, it strips you of the culture. Well, that's a lot of hogwash, because I think the more you move up, the more secure you become and the more you're able to practice your culture without having to apologize anymore, or without having to hide to use your culture. For example, I do a two-hour show in Spanish on radio every Saturday; I don't get paid for it. But, to me that's the only way to continue to keep the culture alive--through music, through poetry, through information about

Chicanismo, about our Mexican heritage, etc. I feel that my belief in the culture is stronger now, now that I have time to breathe, than when I was struggling just to stay alive.

J: Do you feel then that the movement is still a positive one? Is it still on, still going?

O: Oh, yeah, it's still on. I think it's getting more positive from the fact that we now have offices in Washington of Chicano organizations. The National Council of La Raza has an office in Washington; El Congreso, a lobbying group for Chicano matters, is in Washington. We are beginning to have a voice. Somehow or another I feel that the Chicano Movement has never gotten the attention that it deserves. Just as we start emerging, another group comes up. Just as we were beginning to emerge, the whole country turned their attention to the Indian Movement. Then there was a time when the attention was diverted by the Women's Movement, and obviously the Black Movement diverted attention. Somehow or another we just never made it to the national level. We don't have a Chicano in the Supreme Court, we've never had a Chicano cabinet member, we've never had a Chicano in the high level position in government, other than Fernando C. de Vaca. When you consider that you have a Black in the Supreme Court, you do have Black cabinet members, you do have women in the Cabinet, limited as it is, somehow or another just as we were getting there another movement, another wave, would come in and kind of knock us down and we'd have to get started all over again. So in that respect, even though we represent the second largest minority group--and at the rate we

are growing, we are going to be the largest minority group in another 10 years--somehow the nation has never given us the attention that we deserve, warrant, or merit.

J: Dr. Olivárez, does the Chicana have a specific role in the movement?

O: Oh, sure; but it's not making coffee and typing the papers and addressing the envelopes. And unfortunately a lot of the guys still feel that that's the only role we have to play in the movement. But, I really think that the Chicana has to find herself first before she can contribute anything substantive to the movement, until she discovers who she is and becomes secure in her own identity. I think we need to give her time to do that; I don't think we can accuse the Chicana of not contributing to the Movement, because she is going through her own personal identity problem. The Chicana has been hit not only with the Chicano Movement, but with the Women's Movement. She has been hit with two very serious questions, and she's got to settle those within herself before she can contribute to the Chicano Movement. I find that the Chicanas are doing a much better job of finding out who they are -- and being very secure in it, once they find out--than the guys. I don't think the guys have ever taken the time to find out just who they are as individuals and then as members of an ethnic group. The guys have always had things come to them very easily. We've had to struggle for every little scrap. As a result of that, some of the guys can't really define the movement; they've just been swept in the current. The Chicanas are asking some very serious questions: What does it mean to me as a woman? As a mother (if she happens to

be a mother)? As a divorcee? Or as a wife? And what does it mean to somebody that wants to get an education, somebody that wants to work, somebody that wants to be self-sufficient? So once she gets to the level where she can answer all those questions, I think she can be a better contributor to the Movement than if she just comes along to be led. So, I think the Chicana has some major contributions to make; if for nothing else, it's straightening the guys out as to what their role is suppose to be in the Movement. Because the guys are under the assumption that "parenthood" means just "mother"; and I'm saying "parenthood" means "mother and father", that they both have responsibilities towards their children and their family, and that it means giving the woman breathing space so that she can become herself. I think she becomes a better compañera in the long run if she's allowed to have breathing space on her own and not depend entirely on what he says.

J: As the last question in this area, I'd like to ask you what your views are on the Women's Movement or the Feminist Movement?

O: Well, basically I see it as a movement for rights, not so much for liberation and not so much for what feminism or what the Feminist Movement means. I see it as an acquisition of rights that have been denied woman all along. The mere fact that the Constitution in many instances refers only to men, "that all men are created equal", is an indication that at that time nobody was thinking of us as individuals and as human beings; we were still being thought of as chattels. So my view of the Women's Movement is that it is a movement

to acquire rights, which means that you want to be equal with the men, not the same. You've got to learn the difference between being equal and being the same. I don't want to be the same as the guys; I happen to like guys. Some of my best friends are men. So I don't want to be the same, but I do want to be equal. If I'm in line for a promotion in this administration, if there's a promotion being made, I want to be considered along with a man; and I don't want to be given one just because I'm a woman and somebody needs to look good in their Affirmative Action program, or in their Civil Rights action. I think women are really saying, "Let me be a free human being, and let me exercise my talents and abilities without being saddled with a sex label." Of course, a lot of people say, "Do you want to give up all those special little attentions that you get as a woman?" I keep hoping that the special attentions that I'm getting, I'm getting because I'm a human being and not because I'm a woman. So when they say, "Now that you're liberated do you still want me to open the door for you, and light your cigarette, and pick up the tab at the restaurant?" I answer, "The only door I want opened is the door of opportunity, and I think I can do that myself." And as far as lighting my cigarettes, I'd be very happy to light a guy's cigarette; and as far as picking up the tab at the restaurant, if I happen to be with a guy who earns less than I do, why shouldn't I pick up the tab? But if he wants to pick up the tab because he considers it a down payment on a lay job, then I don't want him to pick up the tab; I don't want to be indebted to him for a meal or a cocktail or anything like that. So it's a matter of understanding what we want.

We don't want to trade places with the men and we don't want to do away with the men, but we do want some options. We want the ability to share the responsibilities for our family, we want the ability to earn our own money, we want the ability to make our own choices.

So I see it more as rights than liberation. I'm for the liberation of the people of all the world, men and women. But I'm for acquiring full rights for all women who want them.

J: Dr. Olivárez, those were all the questions I wanted ask you, so I want to thank you for granting us this interview today. We appreciate it.

O: My pleasure.