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Interview no. 333

William Flores

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: William Flores (1897-1981)
INTERVIEWER: Oscar J. Martinez
PROJECT:
DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 26, December 4, 1975
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BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

(Former National President of LULAC) Born on his family's ranch in Socorro, Texas on February 23, 1897. Formerly employed by William Beaumont General Hospital; veteran of World War I.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; educational experiences; Anglo/Mexican relations in El Paso; experiences with LULAC; the word "Chicano" and the Chicano Movement; job experiences; discrimination.

1 hour, 15 minutes; 34 pages

M: First, Mr. Flores, could you tell me when and where you were born?

F: I was born in Socorro, Texas on the family ranch, on February 23, 1897.

M: Could you give me a little bit of background about your parents?

F: Well, I got it there in that book.

M: Is there anything that you would like to add to what is in that book that I just read?

F: No.

M: Well, I'd like to ask you some questions that are not in that book.

F: Okay.

M: Your father was a very prominent man here in El Paso.

F: Yes--El Paso, Cd. Juárez, and all the valley here, all the surrounding country here. He attended to all the business of the Spanish American people. There were very few people who could do that. He had a law office, that's what he had; and he was even an attorney in Juárez, Mexico. He did a lot of business there in Juárez, too.

M: And your father also held elective office here in El Paso.

F: Yes he did. He was the County Clerk for quite a number of years, and he was also a teacher in Juárez. At that time it was not called Juárez, but Villa del Norte; that's what the name was. And then he moved and he took over the school at Las Cruces, and then he came over to Ysleta and took the school at Ysleta. I don't know what the duration was, but I guess he lasted about eight years as a professor in these three towns here.

M: Mr. Flores, how did your father get along with Anglo Americans?

F: Well, just fine. He got along just fine because he was an intelligent man, a man who made a little bit of money and he was a prominent man. And of course he didn't have hardly any trouble at all. He also was an interpreter for the Federal Court here in El Paso for many, many years.

But as far as his getting along with people, of course, he didn't have to go through what most of the people had to go through, because they didn't have any money and no education, and of course that makes a lot of difference.

M: So your father's case was exceptional here in El Paso?

F: I think so, yes; I think so. And then he didn't look like a Mexican anyhow, he looked like any other American.

M: What influence did your father have on you as you were growing up?

F: Well, he and I were very close. I thought that my father was the best looking man in the whole county here. I thought he was the most intelligent man that I'd ever seen. And he also knew French very well. At that time, all those people who had a very good education had to learn French in order to get along. With what, I don't know. He never hardly ever used the language at all.

M: Did your father ever talk about how Mexicans were treated by Anglo Americans here?

F: No. He and I didn't have to do that because... We didn't have very much of that talk at home at all or at the office. I used to go into his office and help him out in there, as a stenographer, you know. And, of course, most of the complaints they had were just law complaints about property or schools or things like that.

M: And you attended schools here locally?

F: I attended public schools locally here. I attended also Palmore College, one of the best colleges in North America; at the time it was considered one of the best ones. I went down there to study Spanish. And I graduated from there in commercial subjects--Bookkeeping, Stenography,

Spanish, and so forth.

M: What do you recall, what incidents stand out from your early school years, in elementary school?

F: Well, what stands out most was that I was in high school two years, and there were only two Spanish American students at that time. And I was not mistreated in any way, but there was some way that they talked to you, you know, and you had pretty difficult times to get together with other people because we were always fighting. In school, you know, in the grammar school, we used to take sides and a bunch of us Mexican guys would go to one corner, and the Americans /to/ another, and it was just fighting all the time. And then when I got to high school, we didn't get to fighting at all, but their attitudes... So I told my father I didn't want to go to school anymore, and he sent me to the Durham's College, which they had here, commercial courses also, then from there I went to Palmore College; and International Business College, I also attended that.

M: What was the attitude of the students in high school, the Anglo students?

F: Well, just the way they looked at you, you know, and then the way they treated you in the class. Of course, I wasn't treated wrong, but you can see when you're not wanted, you couldn't have any friends there that were worth a darn. This other fella and myself had to be just the only ones that went together to the school and then come back home. And what you want in school, you want to have a lot of people to talk to you, you know, have friends. And they...that's the only bad treatment I got. 'Cause we used to fight all the time, you know. I used to be a good scrapper at that time, too. When anything went wrong, oh, you know, I

just had a little fisted engagement there and that was _____. (Laughter)
That's all that I could say about that, because I wouldn't let them...
Which I had a father, you know, he was prominent here, and the teachers
wouldn't dare to do anything wrong because they would have a complaint
on their hands. But it's not like going to school and having friends
and getting into the activities of the school. When you are isolated...
So I didn't get to complete school at all, I just went to high
school two years.

M: Did you have Mexican friends in high school?

F: Well, there was only one.

M: In high school?

F: In high school.

M: Just yourself and one more?

F: That's right.

M: What happened to all the other Mexicans from you neighborhood?

F: Well, the Mexicans, they didn't go to high school at all, hardly any.
At that time, it was pretty expensive for them to do so, and they were
very poor people mostly. And some of them went away from El Paso to
study in other places, you know.

M: What did they go study when they left El Paso?

F: Well, I don't know.

M: Business courses?

F: Usually we took business courses, you know, all the way through, like I
did. You would prepare yourself for that. And if you could get a job
as a clerk, you'd be doing pretty good. 'Cause they wouldn't give you
a job if they had any Anglo. And the worst part of it was, the Anglos

here were the Italians, the Bulgarians, the French, the English; and all the races of the world were "gringos," and the only Mexicans were us. Why, we were in a hell of a shape. We used to fight with all the races of the world in El Paso that I can remember, 'cause nobody wanted to be a Mexican, you know. And then they went to the side of the Anglos here in El Paso.

M: Who went to the side of the Anglos?

F: Well, the different races we had here in El Paso. If you were Italian, you went alongside the Anglos and we called you "gringo." And the French came over here, and the same thing. Nobody wanted to be a Mexican. So we had one race against all the others. That's the way that they used to take advantage of us. And then the Mexican people here didn't know English in the first place. The only thing that they had known in their life was Spanish, and badly spoken. And many of them didn't know how to read, as I said a while ago. That was one of the drawbacks we had. Today you find the same thing; you don't have to go very far. You see Italians, they speak English well, and they act like Americans. And you've got a Mexican, he's a foreigner to you, boy, and I don't mean maybe. You still see those things, very markedly.

M: Were there Mexicans in those days who wanted to pass themselves off as Anglos?

F: They'd better not! (Laughter) They'd better not, or we'd gang up on him! No, nobody wanted to be a gringo then. They hated the doggone gringos as much as they hated us. We all was fighting at the school grounds; and sometimes we even had to go to their barrios, you know, and fight 'em over there, and sometimes they came to ours. It was with

rocks or whatever we could, with fists. It was very pronounced at that time.

M: Would you say that discrimination was very pronounced in those days?

F: Oh, heck yeah. Definitely.

M: What can you remember, what events?

F: Well, one striking event that I can recall right now is about my wife.

/My/ second wife was a gringa from Lubbock, Texas. She had a little sister, a very pretty sister, and her sister came to El Paso, and she stayed in Lubbock working there. And my wife--well, she wasn't then my wife, but the one that was later on my wife--she heard that her sister was going around with some Mexican guys here in El Paso. So the first chance she had she took the train and she came to El Paso to take her back. And then she married me, she stayed here. And then I asked her later on, I said, "Why did that happen? What had a Mexican done to you?" She says, "Well, Bill, you don't understand." She says, "In Lubbock, Texas, the only Mexicans we knew were being brought in from Mexico. They had burlap bags around their legs, and they hardly had any pants on, and dirty, just like animals. We thought that all the Mexicans were just exactly the same. I got to El Paso and I find out that you have very beautiful people here." So she married me and then she was very, very friendly towards Mexican people and Mexicans towards her, and they loved her all through her life. Because she used to go to conventions, and she used to help me a lot in LULAC. That's the one example I can give you that was very striking; even my wife thought that about the Mexican people. She says, "I didn't know any better."

M: But that example takes on a very positive turn and the results are good.

F: Oh, yeah; of course. Definitely.

M: Can you think of other examples where the results didn't turn out to be good?

F: Well, for example at Beaumont Hospital, where I was working with the government, I used to be in charge of personnel. And people from El Paso whom I knew very well had very nice looking boys, except their name was Martínez or /something like that/; we had to give them jobs that were much more inferior to the ones that the gringos had, for example. And I wanted to break that habit of those son of a guns thinking that the Mexican can only get lower jobs. So I was the first one that employed a /Mexican/ clerk in Beaumont Hospital. But I was certain that I had put somebody down there in much beyond the capacity for that position. So the first man I put in there, they were crazy about him; good looking boy and well educated. (He's still here.) And after that they used to tell me, "The first _____ you get _____ a guy like Mike over there." And then after I put the first one, it was very simple for me to /get/ plenty of Mexican girls as clerks and as bookkeepers, and what we needed there. There was no problem after. But it had to take a long time, and you had to be smart enough.

For example, we had two messes, General Mess and Detachment Mess. And they had the worst kind of Mexicans there, so they used to kick them around and insult them. So I had to find out how in the hell I could fix up the matter. So the only way I could fix up the matter was to hire two prize fighters, one in one place /and one in the other/ and then put them in charge of the messes. And I said, "Well you have to be very careful. I'm going to put you over there and you're going

to have a lot of trouble. But be sure that you're on the right side; don't take any shit from anybody. But if they deserve it, just whack the hell out of them. I'll be responsible, I'll see that nothing happens to you." And that happened, too, you know. (Chuckles) So after that all the Mexican kids had a very good time working there and were satisfied, and the conditions changed entirely.

I knew that the gringo...the reason that they were pretty smart-alecky about us too was that they were big, they were tall, and the Mexican people were very small at that time, much more smaller than they are now. There very few guys that were of your built and that were big enough to defend themselves. My kids, for example, are about half a foot taller or a whole foot taller than I am, too. So you had to use your common sense in order to... But I can't put that in that little sketch I gave you, because, I thought you sure didn't want any of that baloney.

M: Oh, that's very important. That's not baloney! (Laughter)

F: And somebody had to do something, and I did the right thing.

My wife one time, we went down to a LULAC meeting. It was a very important meeting; I think some ladies wanted to join LULAC and we were all together, and we were supposed to go to see something about LULAC or their joining or something. But I had to go some other place and my wife said, "Let me go, Bill." I says, "Well, they'll kill you there, boy! They hate the hell out of you gringos! You'd better not go." She said, "Don't you worry about that. I'll attend to it." So she went in there, and I says, "You know what to do anyway, you know about LULAC work anyhow. Probably you'll get together with them, but I doubt

it." So when I went back, and the other fellows went back, there she was laughing to beat the band with all the doggone gals in there. To show you that she loved the Mexican people; but that's after she knew who she was dealing with.

But there are lots of incidents I wish now that I would have taken care of, but there were so many of them. I said before, we used to meet once a week, and then within the week we had to do work for LULAC, we were doing this and doing that. But it was something that we were supposed to do, and we were not bragging about it, saying we did. The way that LULAC worked, previous to LULAC, you didn't see any Spanish American organization or Mexican organization that amounted to a damn thing, or that lasted for a long time. And we wanted LULAC to last because that was the only chance we had, at least one organization to keep on fighting. The /other/ organizations began fighting against each other. And the politicians who were here, of our race /who/ had good positions here in El Paso, they were just the scums of the earth, actually, and they were the ones that were leading these people to vote for somebody else. That's the only thing that they wanted to do. LULAC had a different way of fighting discrimination. You never did hear of us in a riot or having in the papers that we did something worthwhile. We kept it quiet. And what we used to do was, /if/ there was anything wrong in anyplace, the schools, for example, then we would get the facts and see first whether we were right or wrong. Now when we knew that we were on the right track and we knew that we had a good complaint, whether it was school or anything else, we then would see the big shots--they were actually politicians, that's what they were. And we went to them,

a committee went to see them, and presented our facts and said, "We can prove our charges;" and they could fix it up just as easy as that. We had no trouble. In other words, we didn't holler about what we were doing at all. And you'll see that LULAC wasn't very well known for that reason--I mean all over the country. Of course, they knew it here because LULAC had been here for a long time. But we could accomplish a lot of good by going at it the right way. The politicians, because some of us were kind of important, you know, they wouldn't dare not help us if they knew that we were right. We threatened many times, "We'll go to the papers with this charge here if you won't listen to us. But I know that you can correct it." And they promised to correct it and they did so; and we were satisfied.

M: You joined LULAC around 1933.

F: 1932.

M: What caused you to join LULAC?

F: Well, just about that time I used to be a member of three veteran's organizations. What made me join LULAC was that about that time (Machuca was the one who did it) they brought some pamphlets about LULAC and they showed us the code of LULAC, which is one of the prettiest codes that I've ever seen, much better than the Constitution of the United States. (Because the Constitution is a bunch of lies anyhow. It started with, "We're going to be free," and they didn't consider the Negroes at that time, or the Mexicans; they were considering those people who came from England when they said that all Americans would be free.) And I fell in love with the code, the LULAC code. And then the aims and purposes, which right now there are 25 (I have them there in Spanish

and English), they were very precise as to what your aims and purposes was in becoming a LULAC member.

And then besides, there was no politics involved in LULAC at that time. Of course, you have to get a little bit involved in politics in order to get where you want to go.

Then I went to Dad and I asked him, "Dad, here's an organization, I think it's a wonderful organization, and they're organizing now." It was about 1929. "What do you think about my joining it?" He says, "Well, the only thing you have to remember is one thing: this is a fine work, wonderful work; but don't pay attention to the Constitution now. Pay attention to the men who are forming this club here. And if these people are in there certain politicians, don't you join LULAC because you cannot join LULAC, because you're going to get in trouble in your job with the government, because the government will not allow you to be in politics. So, if these people are there, don't join." So I went to the meeting, and sure enough, there were about 10 of them, and my father had told me not to have anything to do with them. So I told Machuca and the rest of them why I didn't want to join. I says, "When you get rid of these people here, I'll join you and I'll be glad to join you." So then in 1932--it took them that long in order to get me to become a member.

M: Who were these people?

F: Well, these people were Girón, for example, they were Montoya, they were the Alderetes here in El Paso who were Democrats, and they had control of all these Mexican people that used to live in South El Paso and Ysleta and Socorro and San Elizario. But they were little men here,

they /weren't/ very much in comparison to what the gringos were; they were being managed by the gringos by giving them jobs as deputies and clerks in the court and things like that. And those were the ones that my father told me /about when he told me/ not to join, because they would get me in trouble. And of course, they were the big shots. Those people were not fully qualified to do any of the work here for the Mexican people at all, or for the Americans at the time. They just /had/ little jobs at the courthouse that didn't amount to a damn thing. And that's the biggest, most important thing we had at that time here in El Paso. They were not entitled to anything like that, but the Americans had them there and they wanted a job, and they had to do whatever the other people told them to do.

M: How was it that LULAC got rid of these people?

F: Well, I asked Machuca several times. For three years he tried to get me in there, and I told him, "As long as you have these people here, I won't dare come in here." I says, "But if you get rid of them..." And Machuca was working then for the government, he had an important job there. He was an Immigration officer, I think. (And he's a pretty smart boy.) And he says, "Well, when I get rid of those people, we'll come around and see you again." But I guess he got together with a few of the other people, because Gómez was very much a politician himself at that time.

M: Modesto Gómez?

F: Modesto Gómez, yeah. He didn't tell you about that? Modesto Gómez was a big politician here at one time. He worked hard for politics. I can show you a letter there, that he was the one responsible for getting my

boy in Annapolis and West Point. I got a letter from him there that he addressed to Thomason. And of course since Modesto was one of the big shots here as far as voting was concerned, why, Thomason was a very good friend of his. And I got the letter that put him through, through Modesto.

M: So then you joined in 1932?

F: 1932, and I stayed there for about 30 years, consecutively from one year to the next.

M: What were some of the issues that LULAC was involved in at the time that you joined?

F: Oh, hell...(Chuckles)

M: That was right at the Depression.

F: Well, yeah, that was at the _____ time, too. We had a lot of issues. As I said before, we were very lucky to solve most of them. The basic issues that came in, this hatred of people against the other, it's taken along time to eradicate itself. It hasn't been easy. Now, my boy in school, for example, he doesn't speak Spanish, and they don't even know that he's a Mexican. The other boy the same way, he married an American girl from Minnesota, got two girls. And he's kind of a smart boy, so he won't have any trouble. He never did have trouble, I suppose, as far as his being a Mexican is concerned. I don't know, he never did complain to me about anything.

M: Do you think Mexicans here in El Paso have progressed?

F: Oh, hell... It would be a wonder if we had a lawyer or a doctor, or any of those jobs that you see. Dozens of our people here that are doctors and lawyers and judges, you didn't see anything like that.

And then the people that go to school, you know, they go to school, by gosh; and they might be discriminated once in a while, yes, but I don't hear any discrimination now as I used to anyhow. The question is that wages that are being paid are much higher. They're lower than most of the places in the United States, but many of our people are making very good money. And they don't have to be lawyers, either, to make money nowadays. Their wives are working, their kids are working. You go into the stores, you know, and you see just Mexican girls mostly there. You don't even know whether you're talking to one or not. So there's been a tremendous change here and elsewhere about the Mexican people, but there are still a lot of things to be done.

M: What was the turning point in bringing about many of these changes that you notice now?

F: Well, I believe that the most important of all would be education. The boys are able to go to school in higher education, and that's what's made it much better for the Mexican people here.

M: When do think things started changing?

F: Oh, it's been very gradual to me, very gradual.

M: Can you identify any particular period when you started noticing these changes?

F: Well, I believe, for example, that the war changed it a lot; that's during the Second World War, when our people used to go to Europe, you know, and they were treated like American soldiers; and they realized then that the other races were not any much better than they were. They came back and they asserted their rights with more force, you know. I think that was one of the basic things that happened here that long

ago. And then of course education has brought a change because, as I told you, when I was a younger fella most of those people that we had here, some very nice people, they didn't know a word of English at all, and some of them didn't want to learn it. And now, everybody knows English. So you can communicate with the other people. That has brought a great change. And the fact that so many people have inter-married to a gringa, my girl is married to a gringo, too; I have another boy married to a gringa. My boy and my girl, they went to college, to the university, and they're smart enough to defend themselves now by knowledge of English, knowledge of what they're taking. But it's been so gradual.

What I think is wrong with the people here in the United States, our people here... Let's take as an example here in El Paso. When I was a young fellow, the people I worked with, they were very nice people, Spanish people mostly. Wonderful people. Well, the "Chicanos" were another sort of people. They were not our people; they were Mexicans, but the Chicano was the worst kind of Chicano you can have. They were laborers, you know, farmers, or people who didn't know how to read or write. That kind of people, we designated as "Chicano." But not us, we never did designate us as Chicano at all. Now this new word is very popular now. When you refer to something... Like once I said, "Bueno, es chicano." And you don't get offended by that. (Chuckles)

M: And in those days, people would get offended?

F: I don't think so now; they would have gotten offended at one time because we used to call them chicanos. But we were of course higher on the scale. (Chuckles)

But what I find is this--and you can see it right here in El Paso, you don't have to go to California or Arizona or anyplace. Here in El Paso you have so many... Like say, the city of Socorro, we'll take a place like that. You had some settlers here in the El Paso valley and they're gone, because why? Because conditions at that time were very poor and they went to California, especially California, and used to get better wages in California; you know that, everybody knows that. So the people that were living here have moved. Then, who has replaced them? The ones that come from Mexico, see? People who were in the condition that our people were here in before. Then these people get pretty smart themselves, you know, and they go to California or Chicago or someplace; so more people come in, and not only to be in their place, but a great big number, much over the ones we had here have come from Mexico. Those people have to adjust themselves to conditions here, isn't that right? They have to adjust themselves to conditions here and they have to learn English, they have to prepare themselves. And out they go into other parts of the country. So it's a thing that'll never end. Absolutely; it's actually an invasion of this country here. About the Mexican people, you could call it a Mexican invasion into the United States. How many have we got now? Six million people here in the United States?

M: Five million, illegally.

F: One of these days they'll declare war against the United States and try to secede one of these days, you know. (Laughter) But that's their condition. Now, if the people would stay here permanently and have better jobs, and better pay--they would have better pay and better jobs

because the people would see to it that they did. They wouldn't go away and leave their hometown just for the sake of doing it. These people would be prepared and educated and /have/ good jobs and all that; okay. /That/ would be the ideal thing for us. But this thing is coming in and going out, coming and going; this is what messes the situation for us, because people that come from over there, you can pay them any amount of wages you want. /If you/ pay two-something an hour, you can get one for a dollar over there. In other words, the Immigration has not been able to control that situation nor will they control it in the future. Now, what is going to happen? I don't know.

M: This word "chicano," was that used when you were a young man, when you were a boy?

F: It was used in that particular sense, when we wanted to say that he was no good.

M: But you remember that being used like that when you were a boy?

F: Oh, yes. I wouldn't refer to you as a chicano, for example, you wouldn't refer to me as a chicano, by any means, because that was a distinct class entirely, the chicanos from the Spanish American or whatever you call it. First we had the Spanish American, next came the Mexican American. And then the people that came here from Mexico at that time never did want to become Americans whatsoever, they just wanted to be Mexicans. They were proud of being Mexicans; what for, I don't know. My wife is from Mexico--she's an American citizen now--and suffered quite a bit in Mexico--no housing, no jobs, no nothing for the girls in Mexico at all. They have to come over here, you know, as _____, for example, and God only knows what happens to those girls. The low

wages they're paying them, they don't pay them hardly anything. And you'll find thousands of people going to California because California is a state where they can employ them. There are farms there where they can hire these people, and other places, of course.

M: Going back to your high school days, Mr. Flores, are there any particular incidents that stand out in your mind in high school?

F: No. I just went to school and came back home to play just as fast as I could. I didn't like it at all. I never did care for high school here in El Paso at that particular time.

M: What do you remember about your neighborhood?

F: Well, in our neighborhood it was different. We had the tracks between us all the time, and they usually did name the south side /as/ the Mexican side. And mostly we always lived on the American side. Here in El Paso the American side was from San Antonio Street or Delta, /from/ Second Ward towards the north; that was the American side there. And we always lived there. But there were many other people _____
_____ from the north side.

/Pause/

Gómez was _____ living himself on the Mexican side most of the time because he's got his business there, and he got very much interested with us, with Bowie High School, in LULAC's dealings with Bowie. He had his boys and his girls attend Bowie. I used to criticize him for it, I remember. I said, "What do you mean by sending your kids to Bowie High when you could send them to the north side any time you want to." He never did agree to that. He stayed firm, that he was going to help Bowie and that his kids were going to graduate from there.

I said, "Well, they'll graduate but they'll get themselves probably
_____ like them to get."

/Pause/

M: Mr. Flores, I want to ask you a question about the word "chicano."

When was the first time that you heard this word?

F: Well, I've heard the word "chicano" ever since I was a very small boy. But, as I said, the ones that we referred to as chicanos were people who were very poor, and very untidy, and people of the worst sort, you know. And those, we referred as chicanos. The other people were not referred as chicanos at all; they were referred as Spanish or Mexican Americans. And, los marihuanos, we had a lot of marihuanos at that time too, you know. They were one of the classes that were included in the word "chicano." The word "chicano" just popped up just a few years ago. Now it's applied to all members of the Spanish and Mexican race. And there's where you have your divisions, too. All these programs that you see on the T.V.s, that you have by Chicanos are terrible examples of the Spanish and Mexican culture. We don't want to see those kinds of shows; at least I don't want to see them. I want to see something real nice, you know. We have nice things to present to the public. The people who are managing those programs, too, you know, their Spanish /is/ bad, and so is their English. But the programs themselves, you have to have some expert to take hold of those programs and present to the public something that's nice about our people.

M: How do you feel about the Chicano Movement?

F: Well, what I felt about the Chicano Movement, this is when it was coming, I knew what was coming, because I was right in doing LULAC work and civic

work at that time. And our policy was, as I told you before, that LULAC would do a lot more for our Mexican people if we would continue doing what we did before, instead of riots and this and the other. And I knew that as soon as these people were to get hold of money to help the Chicano along, that this kind of Chicanos were going to take over. And I left LULAC at just about that time, because I thought that what they should have done was to have given the prominent LULACers and the people who had been working before for so many years money in order for them to continue their work, rather than just throw away the money to people who, well, were not educated; they were not people who could represent your people at all. And I thought that there would be riots, and this and the other, if we continued to be doing like the black people were doing. Fortunately, we haven't had any of that here, except on very few occasions in California and South Texas and so forth and so on.

But the change came just about 1965, I believe, if I'm not mistaken, and just about that time I left LULAC, because I didn't want to be there to fight with any of those groups. Frankly, speaking to you, I'll say that, because I knew that instead of going up we were going to go down. But, however, there was one thing that we never did have before-- we now had money, you know, and previously these people couldn't have done anything about our people if they would have worked it all out on their own.

M: Do you think the Chicano Movement has done any good?

F: Well, I thought, and I still think, that the Chicano Movement has done a lot of good, of course, 'cause they have had the money to do a few little things, they have excited the people a little bit. But I

thought, and I still think, that what we needed was to be forceful, and the only ones that could do that would be that kind of people, you know, so they could get the people to see exactly what's in their wards, you know, and where they were living. LULACs would have never...we don't like to be parading and saying, "I'm Chicano," and having the Mexican flag and all that baloney, you know. I know that that's the only way to accomplish things, because some big official from Washington told us, he says, "Riot, burn, or do whatever you want to, but do it! Because if you don't do it, and Washington doesn't see about you, you're lost." That's the way he talked to us.

M: Who was that?

F: That was Humphrey.

M: Humphrey?

F: Yes, sir. When he was here he told us that.

M: He told you to go out and demonstrate?

F: Demonstrate, that's right. /He says/, "If we don't hear from you guys in Washington, then you're lost. Do something that..."

M: Gets the word back?

F: That's right. And I did believe that he was right, because /since the demonstrations/ now all the colleges have preference for college education for our people. I didn't have any trouble trying to get by boy /into college/. They gave him \$10,000 in the University for him to continue his education. Just like that, he went in there, because he was of a minority group. And he told me, he says, "That's the only way I can get something out of these doggone things, through the Chicano Movement." He says, "In our school, what the whites are complaining

/about the most is that the other people, the Chicanos and the minority groups are getting far much better money and they're being pushed by the government more than the gringos." So he got in there that way; 'cause he knew what he was doing; but I did not know what he was doing over there at the time. But I know now that that's exactly what helped him along. If we didn't have that movement, probably I wouldn't have gotten him /into college. I had a little _____, of course, but I don't think I ever would have gotten him in Columbia, anyhow.

M: In Columbia Law School, right now?

F: Yeah.

M: Could you go back and tell me about the different jobs that you've had since you've been a youth?

F: Well, I started being a manager of an employment agency, Arviso Company. I was bookkeeper and general manager, and I did everything in the office. But I was the manager because the owner didn't even know how to read, so I had to do all the work that was to be done. Then I went to the Army, as I said before, and immediately I was taken into the office as a secretary of the adjutant and the commanding officer; and the sergeant major at that time was a big old guy. And then I became a medical stenographer, and doing autopsy work; did a good job out of that. And then I left the Service as a sergeant and then I got a job as a Spanish-/English stenographer with Crane Brothers in Nogales, Arizona. I stayed there for about six months. In the meantime they called me back to the Army, to the medical department. Not to the Army, I was within the Army but I was a civilian employee.

M: How long were you in the Army?

F: Two years and three months.

M: That was during World War I?

F: That's right.

M: And then they called you back as a civilian?

F: They called me back as a civilian employee, yeah. And then they were building this new Beaumont General Hospital, then we moved from there to William Beaumont General Hospital in July 1, 1921, I believe it was.

And then from there, I was a bookkeeper, I was a stenographer, I was a Spanish-English translator. And then the hospital began to grow and grow. I had been in charge of a small group of employees, so as the number of employees increased. Of course, I had different jobs there to contend with in the jobs I held there. As a civilian, I had the job as Analyst, Public Relations Officer, Placement Officer, and finally I became Director of Civilian Personnel.

M: For the whole hospital?

F: For the whole hospital. We had there anytime from 300 up to 1500 people.

M: When you first started working in the hospital, what positions did Mexicans occupy there?

F: Well, when I started working at the hospital there, when we moved to Beaumont, we had cooks, we had assistant cooks, we had laborers, we had mess attendants (who'd work in the mess), and we had ward attendants (those who would work in the wards)--in the menial positions. And mostly those that we employed were of Spanish or Mexican extraction.

M: How was the job situation in El Paso at that time for Mexicans?

F: That's when you first started working at the hospital?

F: No, 1921. But about 1928, '29, these people who were working there,

the Mexican people who were working there, were actually getting good salaries for about eight years during the Depression. And you had to be lucky to get a job, not only in Beaumont Hospital, but also here in town. In other words, there was a terrific scarcity of work for anybody. So in the grades that I have told you, I didn't have any trouble trying to get very nice and intelligent Spanish American people working for us, at the lower wage; they were glad to get it.

And then we kept on growing, and, of course, I had the fortune of hiring a lot of very nice people and I was trying to get people in the clerical positions, /because/ they were the ones that were always paid more everywhere. And I did not know how to do it. I tried several ways to put the first one in there. And I already related to you that the only way I did it was that I had a very smart boy and the chief of the medical service wanted a secretary, a stenographer there for his place. So from ward attendant, I put this man there as a secretary. I knew he was very, very capable of doing the job, and I just wanted to prove to them that there were a few people of our extraction who could do the jobs. So, I put him there, and then everybody was asking me to see if I could find a man /for them/. Like the major of the medical service there in the hospital, he says, "I wish you'd get him, because I hear he's a very good man." "Oh," I says, "I got lots of people like that. First chance I get, I'll put one of them in there." So that's the way that I got /started/. Once I put a man in there that was capable of doing the job and they liked well, why, it was an easy thing to put our people in any of the positions I had in the hospital, because there were many of them: carpenters, welders, drivers of auto-

mobiles; well, there's lots of them, you know. And I never did have any trouble placing our people there at all.

M: During the Depression, Mr. Flores, I have read that at times Mexicans were fired from jobs so that these jobs could be given to Anglos. Do you recall any of that?

F: Well, I was kind of lucky, I guess, because during the time that I was there, nothing /like that/ happened at all. I was a big cheese there, and they liked me very much, and they told me what policies to follow, and I did follow them to the letter. When anything like that came up, I was there to defend these people--not as a Mexican American, but as a worker in the job. I found to my satisfaction that if you treated every race and everybody the way you should, that you yourself will never get in trouble. Once you begin favoring a certain group or certain people, why, then there's where your trouble begins. But, the people that I worked for were very well satisfied with my work and they never did give me any trouble as far as that's concerned. I probably was very, very lucky.

M: What about in the town itself, outside of the hospital? Do you recall any people under that situation--getting laid off so that Anglos could get their jobs?

F: No. There were lots of those cases, but I'm not intimately informed about /them/. I know what I read in the papers and what we heard in the LULAC meetings, which was the organization we had for so many years. Several things like that came up; and then if we could help them out, we did. And we were successful in most of the cases that we took up. Like in the railroads, there's plenty of records to show that the Mexicans

there were very much discriminated upon. And not only railroad companies, there were a lot of other companies. That was the habit of those people, doing those things to the Mexican people, anyhow.

/Pause/

For example, in the railroads there was a lot of discrimination against employees of Mexican extraction. And then it was the same every other place, because that's the way they used to treat our people. And it was...we had to be satisfied. If you were not satisfied, they'd kick you out and hire somebody else. But specifically I don't remember any cases where that would happen. I remember about the railroads because I had some friends there that knew they could never get anywhere; they had to be apprentices as long as they lived, there, without being promoted to better jobs.

M: How did the Depression affect you personally?

F: Well, I had the finest job. (Chuckles) It didn't affect me any at all, because I had a very good job.

M: You kept your job.

F: I kept my job and was being paid by the government, you know, and I thought I got along just swell. So it didn't affect me any at all.

M: How did it affect the Mexican community in general here?

F: Well, sometimes I would be driving in a car, you know, and see some of my friends with a hoe in their hands or a shovel in their hands, _____ who had never seen a shovel before. And you could see them on the streets everywhere. All your friends were in a hell of a shape. And I knew that many lost their homes, for example. Not only our people lost their homes; many of the Anglos lost their homes, too. But there was

no jobs and they had to put this WPA _____ jobs. But the ones that were holding those jobs as usual would be Mexican Americans. You wouldn't see very many Americans holding those jobs. They were giving them better jobs, I suppose, because you wouldn't see them on the street working like the others. When you see a certain class of people just working /in/ certain lower jobs, you can imagine right away that there's discrimination somewhere.

M: In those days, did you go to Juárez much?

F: Almost every day. That was what we all used to do--go to Juárez and come back; have one or two beers and then come back over here to El Paso.

M: You went down there mainly for recreation, relaxation?

F: Just recreation, to talk to the friends over there. 'Cause everybody used to meet /over there/. People from El Paso used to be there, you know. We used to meet our friends there in Juárez. There were very cordial relations between the Juárez people and the El Paso people at the time.

M: Did you do any shopping over there?

F: No, there was no need of us to be doing any shopping. We'd leave it up /to/ the people who came to El Paso to buy those old hats, you know, and those little trinkets and like that. But all our trade was being done here. We used to go down there to eat, of course, a lot of times; but as /far as buying/ clothing or shoes there, I don't remember any time we did that. And my friends didn't do that either.

M: During the era of Prohibition, did you go down there often?

F: Just as often as I'm telling you. (Chuckles)

M: Every day? (Chuckles)

F: Well, we used to go downtown and meet each other, /and/ I says, "Why don't we go to Juárez?" That was the only thing we did that we enjoyed a lot. Remember that during those times, I think, you couldn't cross the bridge after 9:00 o'clock, and sometimes the fellas, you know, they were a little late and they had to stay in Juárez for that night. But then they changed it to 12:00 o'clock, if I'm not mistaken. And there were a lot of people who would go across from here.

M: Was it pretty wild in Juárez in those days?

F: No, I don't think so. I never thought that it was wild. They had dancers, you know, and they had shows, and there were a lot of American people there who frequented the shows. Yeah, I think that they were more tolerant towards the tourist people at that time /than/ they /are/ now in Juárez. I don't believe that I could remember anything else on that score at all. In other words, all the people that you could see in Juárez, they were from this side. They were your friends; and besides that, you had friends in Juárez. And there was hostility, of course, against our people here, you know, like there always has been, from the Mexican citizens in Juárez towards the people here, especially if you're a Mexican American. They have discriminated against you just for the reason that you are a gringo, and they don't like it at all that you've come over here and become a gringo. You don't here about it at all, of course.

I had a friend (he looks like an American) and he got in trouble with a policeman in one of the dancehalls there. And then he told the policeman, "Este gringo estaba hablando en contra de nosotros, los

mexicanos, y por éso le /di/ un diablazo." Well, the policeman took the other guy, and didn't take this other fella! But it was a lie! This fella was a fighter and he liked to get involved in things like that.

M: Mr. Flores, were you in El Paso in 1916?

F: Yeah.

M: Do you remember the time when Pancho Villa invaded Columbus, New Mexico?

F: I was here in El Paso.

M: There were two things that happened in the first part of that year that I wonder if you might remember something about them. In January of 1916, Pancho Villa's troops killed 18 engineers in Santa Isabel, Chihuahua. Some of those engineers were from El Paso, and their bodies were shipped here. El Paso in general was very upset that that had happened. The Anglo community was very angry at Pancho Villa, and at Mexicans in general, and at one time there were a thousand Anglos who organized themselves into a mob and they were marching down to South El Paso to clean out the Mexican community. Do you remember anything about that?

F: That's news to me. I know there's a lot of incidents where Americans were killed by Pancho Villa there in México, and that the people were very, very incensed about it. But that particular case about the thousand men, I don't remember it. I was here.

M: When Pancho Villa invaded Columbus about two months later, El Paso was again very upset.

F: Well, of course; all of the United States was upset about that. That's the first time, I think, or the second time that the United States had been invaded. (Chuckles) And it had to be invaded by a bunch of bandits!

M: But you don't remember anything about that?

F: No, I don't. I remember only that he went in there and shot up the town and then he left. And then Pershing went after him and never did catch him.

M: Mr. Flores, many Anglo Americans have always held the attitude that Mexicans are lazy by nature.

M: That's right.

M: What do you think about that?

F: That's the biggest lie they ever told, because, in the first place, the Mexicans that work--I don't know about now, but /the ones that/ used to work, laborers or what ever it was--were the finest and best workers they could find anyplace in the world. And all the hard work and all the heavy work that we had here was done by Mexicans. That never was done by the gringos at all. Where in the heck can they say a thing like that for? When you wanted a job done... Of course, there were a lot of lazy guys, you know, like in any race, but generally the Mexican American or Spanish American worker is a harder worker than the other races here because they had to do it, I suppose. While the other people were lazy as hell, our people had to work; because if they didn't work, why, they could kick them out of anyplace they were working. I've heard of many, many cases where the Americans were loafing on the job when their fellow workers who were Spanish Americans were working like hell, and they knew that /they/ were favored just because they were whites. But definitely, I'm quite sure that all the people I had there at Beaumont--hundreds of people--I'd rather have people of my own race there than an Anglo Saxon because the Anglo Saxon wouldn't work, where

our people would.

M: Did you ever hear anybody say that Mexicans were lazy?

F: Oh, I heard that they were lazy and dirty and many other nasty names they called them. Of course, we all heard about it, even from our Anglo Saxon friends. We had to put them on the right track right after they said it.

M: I want to ask you a final question. Do you think that Mexicans here in El Paso have made significant progress in the last few decades?

F: Oh, it's tremendous. Tremendously so. As I said before, the only thing we had were laborers here and farm workers. Now you can see every place you go to that there are a lot of our own people making money. Because success, according to most of the people, means whether they're making money or not; and the people who are making money, they're successful, and the people who do not make money, they're no good. But we have a lot of doctors in town, we have a lot of professional people here, like yourself, for example. We have lots of people here who are earning good money. And I believe they have made a tremendous progress.

But the government actually has been the one that has accomplished this feat. They have helped with the schools, they have helped with their jobs, they have helped with many programs they have. And I even believe that the Negro causes helped our people a heck of a lot, too, by the rights they had, and this and the other, and pushing themselves and doing, and making others obey the Constitution; we were talking about that before, you know. Of course, we don't see it here in the Southwest because there are very few Negroes here. But you can see that in the Northeast and the West Coast that they are getting their

good jobs now and many of them have better jobs than the whites can get, because of education. But it's been a hard climb, and a lot of hardship to do that. But anybody could tell you that that's so, that statement is right. And I believe that as we are a little more educated, we will grow to higher heights. In this section of the country here, we have the governors and have very important people _____ good jobs, too.

M: Can you think of a particular period when you began noticing that Mexicans were making significant change?

F: Well, I think it's since about 10 years ago; probably it's a little less than that. I'm not sure, but during that period, I think it's 1965 or 1960 to the present time, I'll say that they have made significant changes to their advantage.

M: Would you say that up to World War II there was very little progress?

F: I surely would. That's when our people began to be much better off than they had been before. That war, for some reason or other, changed the whole aspect of the situation. And I think it was very significant because when these soldiers went to other countries, we were supposed to think [they were] superior to us, you know. And then when [we] tried to save them, you know, and tried to help them out, they knew that there was no such thing as those people being any better than the people that went from here. So I believe that that invasion of Europe and Asia put these people on the alert, and that is when they began to show that they were not the people who were just going to work as laborers. They all began a little higher by that time, I think, in the jobs. Many of the people I had at Beaumont became officers from ward attendants, from

mess attendants. From the lowest grade in employment, they became officers.

M: What kind of officers?

F: Army officers. They demonstrated to these officers that they were pretty good people who could do the job just as well as anybody else. But the question is that they hadn't given them before that liberty where they could employ those important jobs. But there's many of the people who, oh, I guess by the thousands here in El Paso who have advanced a great deal just because they gave them the chance now. Previously, no chance was given to them at all.

M: What about World War I? Why didn't the same thing happen in World War I?

F: I haven't got the least idea. But I didn't see any change right after World War I at all. I was in it. Probably that's the reason I didn't get to see how the people were getting along.

M: Were there that many Mexicans in World War I? Compared to World War II, would you say there were relatively few in the Service?

F: Well, I don't know about those figures at all, I haven't got the least idea. But I think that they had most of the Mexican people here in the city in the Army both in the First War and the Second War. Especially when they had the drafts, you--they'd draft you and you'd go. And of course, they realized that the Mexicans were just as good fighters as any fighters in the whole world. They found out by the reports given at that time by generals and everybody else.

M: I've run out of questions. Do you have anything else that you want to add to the interview?

F: I haven't got the least idea! (Laughter)

M: Well, I want to thank you very much for taking your time to talk to me and share some of your experiences with me.