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Interview no. 532

Leonel J. Castillo

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Leonel J. Castillo (1939-)
 INTERVIEWER: Oscar J. Martínez
 PROJECT: Border Labor History
 DATE OF INTERVIEW: June 23 and 24, August 24, 1980
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 TAPE NO.: 532
 TRANSCRIPT NO.: 532
 TRANSCRIBER: Virgilio H. Sánchez, Manuela Barrón, Irene Ramirez
 DATE TRANSCRIBED: August, 1980

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

(Former INS Commissioner, politician) Born in Victoria, Texas, on June 9, 1939; grew up in Galveston; graduated from Saint Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas, in 1961; served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Philippines for four years; received his Master's in Community Organization at the University of Pitt; worked for the Houston Neighborhood Centers Day Care Association in a Manpower Program; head of Houston SER office; employed by the diocese at Galveston and Houston; elected and re-elected Houston's Comptroller from 1971-1977; in 1977 served as INS Commissioner for two and a half years; operates Castillo Interests; headed the National Economic Development Association (NEDA) in 1980; has served as State Treasurer of the Democratic Party in Texas; was appointed to the National Hispanic Advisory Committee.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Biography; circumstances leading to his appointment as INS Commissioner; including anecdotes about high government officials; his work at INS, including opposition to his policies, unannounced visits to INS centers and problems encountered, participation in apprehending the undocumented and conversations with them; bridge demonstration at El Paso-Cd. Juárez in March, 1979; meetings with Mexican officials; Carter Plan for the Undocumented; criticism of INS policies by Chicano groups; trip to refugee camp in Thailand in 1978; the "Boat People"; the Tortilla Curtain; meetings with López Portillo; Cuban refugees; United Farm Workers Unions with respect to undocumented migration; the KKK incident; Mennonite question; unsuccessful plan to shift Border Patrol from Dept. of Justice to Dept. of Treasury; "Operation Outreach"; problems along the U.S.-Canadian border.

Length of Interview: 4 hours Length of Transcript: 105 pages

Leonel Castillo
by Oscar J. Martínez
June 23 and 24, 1980

M: Leonel, first of all, can you tell me where and when you were born?

C: I was born in Victoria, Texas, June the 9th, 1939. I'm the last of the Castillos that was born at home. After me, they were all born in hospitals.

M: That's an interesting point. Is your family an old-time family in Victoria?

C: Well, my grandfather arrived in Victoria in 1890 or so; he'd come in 1880 from Linares, México. He married my grandmother, who is from an old town, Rio Grande City/Roma area family, the Morenos. And they moved to Victoria because they had problems with a group called the Rinches*. (Chuckle) Border Patrol predecessors, really. These were actually, as you know, Texas Ranger types. The Castillos had some problems, and they moved from Brownsville, where they had settled in 1880, to Victoria in 1890 or so.

Then in the 1890s my family was there when the first mexicano was buried, mexicana, actually, who died. They had trouble finding a place to bury her, cause the ground wasn't available. They didn't own enough plots of land. They were putting together a cemetery, and they couldn't get land. They /eventually/ got it from a German Lutheran family, I believe. Then my family helped create that cemetery, in Nursery, Texas, right outside Victoria, which my uncles and other relatives have maintained to this day, for almost 100 years. We still keep the archivos, the records, of who's died and who's buried. We've kept it, because when the land was given to the mexicano community, it was given in perpetuity, on the condition that we'd maintain it. So my uncles, my grandfather, my cousins, and other people in Victoria have maintained the cemetery for all these many, many years. It was the Mexican

* Nickname given to Texas Rangers

cemetery, where the Mexicans were buried, as opposed to the Anglos. So we have a long history of being in this country and being in this state.

On my mother's side, of course, they came even before my father's family in 1880; my mother's family was already here. So, yeah, we've got a long, long history in this part of the country.

M: Are your parents alive now?

C: Yeah. My father retired, and he and my mother live in Galveston, Texas. They moved there from Victoria about a year after I was born, somewhere around 1940. They moved from Victoria to Galveston because Galveston had jobs, and it was during the World War. They were going there to work. So I grew up in Galveston, Texas. They're still there in Galveston, very much in the community, very active. My brothers still live there.

M: What did you father do for a living?

C: My father worked on the docking gang for over a quarter of a century. The docking gang is a group of men who used to put big, big ships up on the dry dock. In the old days the way you did this, you had sledge hammers, and you hammered in these wedges and eventually raised the ship up. Now you have hydraulic pumps, but in those days it was all getting under huge ships, 20 tons, 50 tons, hammering away with those huge sledge hammers. He was a foreman, which meant he had to lead a group of very tough, rough, physically very powerful mexicanos, mostly, whose average education was certainly less than fifth grade. His nickname was el jefe. /Laughter/ He had to be the boss. It was very dangerous work. He managed to live and work there without any major accidents, but many of the men who worked there were hurt very seriously over the years.

M: Did he pass on leadership skills to you? Did he consciously try to teach you

things of that type?

C: Yeah. Looking back at it, yes; but at the time I wasn't thinking about it at all. You know, he was also the union rep. for over 20 years, so I was in on the discussions: when they were discussing how to integrate el astille-ro, the dry docks. I was in on the discussion when they were discussing how to get people to join the union or pay their dues. I even helped as early as 13, 14, in keeping some of the records, 'cause I was a literate; I was more literate than many of the men who worked there. I delivered stuff down at the labor hall. I was in on the discussions at breakfast and lunch and dinner. And when they were sitting around drinking beer, I was listening while they talked about how they negotiated with somebody, or why so and so was very good or very bad as a leader or as a negotiator. And I also got to listen, to appreciate the rhetorical skills, the oratorical skills, of my father and many others who, although they had very little formal schooling, were able to recite poetry appropriate to the occasion, on any of 20 occasions. My father could still do it.

M: Is that right?

C: You know, he's in his mid to late 70s, and at a wedding he can still give you the right poem that might go five or ten minutes. Or at another function of some sort he can recite the right poem, all from memory, no text.

M: That's a dying custom.

C: Oh yeah, we don't have that anymore. All of us, we can't work at all from /memory/.

M: It's a beautiful Mexican custom.

C: None of us can work from memory at all, and we don't even know the poems. If you hear them, you don't understand them 'cause the language is a little

bit beyond us. The level of Spanish is archaic and the terminology is a little obscure for us. But he knew all that, even though he had very little schooling. He memorized them. And his memory, in that sense, was much better than ours. Of course, he didn't deal all day with books, he dealt with practical skills.

M: Did you grow up in Galveston?

C: Yeah.

M: You went to school there?

C: Yeah. I went to day care. See, I was lucky. Like so many of us, I got benefits from the war. You realize that afterwards. My benefit was that I was put into a schooling situation, in a nursery, from a very early age--three or four, something like that. I immediately got extra attention 'cause my mother was working and my father was working and I was in school or a nursery. I was already dealing with Anglos, and learning about English, and learning customs and socialization, things that I didn't know about. So then I went to school. By the time I got to the first grade I was more advanced than most of the other mexicanitos who were just learning how to write their name, and learning how to say a few things in English. I was already able in English, by the time I was in the first grade, second grade, so it was a lot easier. I had a lot more advantages. I was also already being considered for skipping grades at that point, because of this ability or this early training I had. And at home, it was still mostly Spanish. My uncle and everybody came by /and/ it was almost all Spanish. But I was obviously introduced to English before the others, and in a better setting, a nursery.

M: Where did you go to college?

C: After I finished in Galveston, I went to Saint Mary's University in San

Antonio, Texas.

- M: San Antonio. Later on I want to come back to you growing up years and your school experiences and so on. For now, I'd like to get a sketch of you life leading up to INS, but I do want to get a lot more detailed information later.
- C: You want to do it like in one minute, or something like that?
- M: No, no, just like you're doing. [Laughs]
- C: I could be brief if you want.
- M: No, no I want you to go ahead and tell me everything that you feel like telling me.
- C: Okay, we're going in summary fashion, in just a few minutes. I finished Saint Mary's University in '61. Then like all other bright young men with a degree in English and lots of ideas, I immediately got on the highway with about five dollars, ten dollars (more like five dollars), and took off for New York City. I took one of those agencies that has a rental car type thing-- you drive a car and that pays your trip. So I went to one of those outfits here in Houston, after we hitchhiked to Houston, and I ended up in New York City.
- M: Just for the hell of it?
- C: Well, I was going to make my career, I didn't know anything. So I showed up at 42nd Street with five dollars and one suitcase. It had all my clothes, my belongings. Half of the suitcase was books. [Laughter] And so there I am in New York City. I had never been there, I had no idea what it was like. (You know, I don't even think I had a suit at that time.) So I just started walking. That was in the evening when I got there. I walked and walked until really at night I finally found a flophouse that had something like a dollar-a-night rooms, and I went in there and got a room. It was all mostly

winos and people like that.

M: You didn't know anybody in New York?

C: Didn't know anybody in New York, had no money; I just took off. I had to see what it was going to be like, so I /just/ showed up /in New York/. I got a job in a few days, working in a tobacco section of a big department store. And so I wasn't eating, 'cause I had no money. I was down to 150 pounds or so. But after, you know, a little more than a month, I was doing quite well; I was getting a regular place to sleep, and I was looking at a job in an advertising agency. I already had my first suit. I bought me a suit, 'cause I was applying for a job downtown. I had also secured a job in the garment district, pushing those carts of clothes around. Then, about then the Peace Corps called me. They'd tried to reach me in Galveston, and they had not found me. But I called home /and/ my mother told me the Peace Corps was looking for me.

M: You had applied to the Peace Corps?

C: Yeah, but I, you know, I'd never heard form 'em. Anyway, eventually the word got to me in New York City that the Peace Corps wanted me to go, so I took a bus to the University of Pennsylvania and went to Peace Corps training. Again, it was a weekend's notice. Went to taining, went to the Peace Corps, and stayed in the Philippines for four years. That was a very good experience. Got married over there to a mestiza, who is a U.S. citizen raised in the Philippines. Came back, finished a Master's in Community Organization, a branch of social work, at the University of Pitt. /I went there/ because U.T. wouldn't give me a scholarship. Pitt would. You've got to be very practical. Where can you pay for it?

And then I went from Pitt to Houston to work for Neighborhood Centers

Day Care Association, which is a settlement house in a Manpower Program. From there I went to head up the local SER office, the very first Jobs for Progress in Houston. It was funded by the government. And from there, I went to work for the diocese at Galveston and Houston, just a year and a half later. Then I ran for Comptroller in '71, was elected, and reelected in '73 and '75. Then in '77 when I was going to run again, I ended up going to Washington to be Commissioner, and stayed there two and a half years, one of my longest jobs.

Then I came back here, ran for mayor, lost. And then I opened my private company called Castillo Interests, which my wife still runs, but which I left about two months ago to come here and head NEDA, National Economic Development Association, which helps minority businesses either to get started or expand. I work here now during the day, at NEDA, and work at night on Castillo Interests and also pursue other interests that I have. And that's my life story.

M: /Laughs/ Well, that's very good in summary form. Let me backtrack to when you were Comptroller of Houston. How was it that you got interested in becoming INS Commissioner?

C: Oh, well, I wasn't interested at all. As a matter of fact, I had been offered several jobs in Washington, because I had been State Treasurer of the Democratic Party, and I was one of the highest elected Mexican Americans in the country at the time. But the administration had offered me jobs having to do with management, budget, and administrative types of responsibilities. And I'd said, "I don't want to leave Houston /and/ go to Washington to do exactly what I did in Houston. Even though you may have a bigger budget, it's still essentially the same problems." So I turned them down.

But one day, somewhere in March or February of '77, I got a call from Joe Aragón, who was at the White House then as a Presidential Assistant. He asked me if I was interested in being Commissioner of Immigration, and I told him that I did not believe in political suicide, that I didn't want any such gift, and that it just made no sense. Joe said that he was very sorry to hear that, because he'd already recommended me; and further, I had a moral obligation to do all I could to help La Raza, and that if I didn't get it, somebody really bad was going to get it. And so I told him, after some discussion, that I'd discuss it with my wife, but that it wasn't too likely /that I'd accept/. After all, I had a pretty good future here. I was in line to be Treasurer of the State of Texas. Because it looked very good, and I had some support from some very powerful groups to do that. The current Treasurer at that time, Jesse James, was very clearly on his last legs, so it looked like I was kind of an heir apparent. The Governor was not against the idea, and Jesse James was not against it, so I'd have to give all that up. But, I discussed it with several people and decided that while it was not a very attractive job, it was a job that offered opportunity to do something important, and it had a lot of moral imperative to it. Most people I discussed it with said, "Don't do it, because it interrupts everything, it messes up everything. You're pretty safe in Houston as a Comptroller. You might not even have opposition. You can go from there to a lot of other things." But I left. I don't regret it. I think I understand it better, but I don't regret it at all.

M: Who was most instrumental in making that decision to take the job?

C: Oh, I was. I mean, I made the decision. I don't want to make it sound like I didn't...I had conflicting opinions. The more idealistic persons, I call

them more activist persons, like Joe Bernal, were the ones who were urging me, saying, "You have no choice." Joe Bernal was then State Senator from San Antonio, or he had just lost the election, I'm not sure which. And he said, "You know, you've got to do it, 'cause look at all the good we can do for La Raza." And then there were others who were much more practical, saying, "If you go, you're giving up your great base for a thankless job, and a job with no future in it. There is no government policy. What are you going to be getting out of it?" So I listened to both sides, and went on.

M: How much did you know about INS when you took the job?

C: I wasn't totally ignorant. I'd been on the advisory committee to the then Commissioner, General Chapman. Matter of fact, I'd helped create it. Because once when he was here in Houston, he had to appear on a T.V. show, on Channel 11, and I had appeared with him. Afterwards, he and I spoke for about an hour and a half in the coffee chop at the television station. He had said that I was one of the few Chicanos he'd ever met who didn't yell at him. And so I said, "Well, that's not my...I don't usually yell at people. If I disagree, I'll tell them, but I'm not one of those people given to yelling." So he and I got along, and I suggested that he ought to have an advisory committee of Chicanos from around the country to give him regular advice on what he might do to relate to the minority community. He thought it was a good idea. He created it at my urging. I wasn't on the first one, 'cause I couldn't afford the trips. Later, it became a federally funded advisory committee, and then I could afford the trips, then I was on it. His first Mexican American assistant was E.B. Duarte (he's another old friend), and I recommended he'd be. So I was familiar with INS through the advisory committee, through my work in lots of committees and community groups. But I was

not at all, not by any stretch of the words, what you'd call an expert.

M: Tell me about this conversation that you had with General Chapman. Anything that stands out particularly about it? Was this the first time that you had spoken to him?

C: Yeah, I'd never met him. I was told, "There is a guy in town, he's the head of Immigration. He's going to have a T.V. show. They want a panel discussion, but not a lot of people, just two people, you and him. Why don't you see what can happen?" So I went down there. He was there with his assistants, and his press, and all that. The show went pretty good; he expressed his views and I expressed mine. We had some dialoguing, the way you do in a 30-minute panel discussion. You try to move it fast. But then afterwards, we had a cup of coffee, and that went on and on and on. That one just was endless, and that went well. I mean, he and I hit it off well, not in the sense, you know, of becoming intimate friends or anything like that, but I was able to communicate with him. Later, when I took the job that he had, I worked out of his office for a week, in Washington. There was never any antagonism on a personal level between General Chapman and me. We were able to talk pretty easily. There was a lot of personal antagonism toward him from a lot of people in the Chicano community, and of course it's easy to understand why and how it happened.

But, it was a long conversation, and we got pretty direct at times. One of the reporters who was there, Jud Mackelvan, later showed me a sketch that someone had made--of that discussion. While we were sitting there somebody from the studio had made a painting or a sketch of that discussion. I don't know if I still have it at the house or if they threw it away, but it showed the General and myself and the reporter, all sitting there talking.

When I finally was appointed, that station was quick to point out that this is where I'd met the General and really gotten involved in Immigration.

M: Did the General try to get information from you about the Chicano community and the opinions out there?

C: The General had very little understanding of what was going on in terms of the Chicano-Latino community. He didn't understand why people were yelling at him. He really didn't. He didn't really understand. He'd always dealt with patriotic mexicanos in the Marines Corps who were good fighters, and he couldn't understand why they weren't being patriotic when it came to defending their border. He didn't understand why people were hesitant to support his ideas on strong Border Patrols and enforcement, and military-type technology on the border. And, he really couldn't understand why they were so angry with him, and why he had no way to reach them. He didn't know who to speak with.

You have to understand, he came in in a Republican Administration, at the height of Watergate. He didn't know anybody. He didn't know who LULAC was; he had no idea who G.I. Forum was; he had no idea what MALDEF did. He didn't know these groups, and to him it was just all as alien as the aliens. He didn't know what the border really was like, except having gone through it. And so he really didn't appreciate or couldn't appreciate what I was discussing, with my background of the cemetery, and the Rinches and all of this. He just couldn't appreciate all of that. He was bright, though, very bright, and was very well read; but always with the military slant.

M: Did you talk at all about the figures he was using, of all this money that was allegedly going out of the country, and all the other problems that aliens were causing here?

C: Oh, yeah. We talked about the difficulty of proving any of those points, the lack of hard evidence. But I have to admit, at that point I was going more on instinct and on what little I knew than on any hard data that I had to rebut. I said, "I don't agree," and "I don't think that's right," and "It'd be hard to prove." But at that point he had what little data there was, and he spoke very authoritatively.

You know, when you speak with a general, you're speaking with a GENERAL, you know. And he's wearing his Marine Corps buttons and his insignia, and he sits very straight and very formal. He speaks in a very commanding voice, you know. He sounds like he really knows the data. How was I going to dispute him? I did, but I don't think I was anywhere near as effective as I later became at arguing with people who argued about the invasion and so on. But there was very clearly a difference of opinion. But we were able to disagree without yelling at each other, and he appreciated that, 'cause I think the General was very genuine, a very sincere person. He really believed that there was an invasion of the United States, and that it was his duty to STOP IT. His life and been geared to military intervention, so when you STOP something, you stop it with an army, or with a package of military activity, with Vietnam era technology, with more Border Patrol, and sensors, and infrared scopes, and helicopters, and all that kind of stuff.

M: But he took your ideas of creating an advisory committee and implemented it?

C: Yeah, yeah. And that advisory committee later evolved into quite a bit. Many of the national leaders in Immigration now were on that first advisory committee.

M: When did you get on the advisory committee?

C: Oh, after it became a federal advisory committee. I was one of the few people

appointed to it. It was November of '76, and the reason I remember it very well is that I was appointed the week before the presidential election. And mind you, here I am the State Treasurer of the Democratic Party /in Texas/ accepting an appointment from a Republican President.

M: That's right!

C: A week before the election.

M: Did you get any flak?

C: Oh, yeah, I got some flak. And I explained by saying, "Look, they need the help, and this committee is going to be around, whoever gets elected. They'll need it even more if we lose than if we win. And further, there is no implication that I'm supporting Ford." As a matter of fact, I issued a statement reiterating support for Carter. But it made life a little bit hairy for me that week. Luckily the press was so filled with the pre-elections stuff, and the Republicans botched the announcement of the appointments so well, that I didn't get much flak.

M: Tell me about your work on that committee.

C: Well, the committee had never met and didn't know quite much about it. So /at/ our first meetings we were briefed, and we were briefed, and we were briefed to death, with everybody telling us about every study and everybody telling us about everything /that was/ happening at INS. And for two days, we'd hear report, after report, after report. And at the time I thought, "What a waste of my time. I want to get into some issue I can deal with." But it turned out it was a great educational vehicle. By our second meeting we formed committees and began to look at INS's internal operations. And given the tenor of the times, we were concentrating on things like: "Why don't you hire more Chicanos?" "Why don't you hire more Spanish-speaking

people?" "What are you going to do about it?" So that's what we did. We concentrated on that, and that went well. We were able to begin pushing then on EEO-type activities, and we were able to keep pushing then on internal stuff of that sort. At that point, we were not too clear ourselves on what we thought the right policy should be.

M: Was this an all Chicano committee?

C: The first one was called the National Hispanic Advisory Committee--some Cuban, some other Latino, but mostly...

M: Mostly Chicanos.

C: Yeah, mostly Chicanos--Al Valverde and myself, Father Gallega from Chicago, Raul Izaguirre, a number of people like that. This was the very first one. When I got in office I later changed it, broadened it; but at that point we were just primarily Chicano, primarily Latino, trying to figure out what to do.

M: You've already told me about the feeler that you got from Aragón, about the position and your decision to take it. What happened after that? Hearings right away?

C: Well, the first step in a confirmation process is, they offer you the possibility of being named. They never offer you the job. And then, you explore that possibility. So I went up there and I had interviews with the Attorney General. Then after he agreed, I then went over to have interviews with the head of the Judiciary Committee. That would be Senator Eastman.

M: Anything memorable about those meetings?

C: Oh, they were all exciting. And the final one (this was April), almost the exact moment I was in with the Attorney General, the Hanafi Moslems, a group or sect in D.C., took over a number of facilities in the City Synagogue and City Hall as well, I think. And I was there. While I was talking with the

Attorney General, all these people were just swirling all around him, giving him reports on the Moslems and on the hostages. And he was talking to the mayor of Washington. Security was tightened all around him, but he was very cool--Judge Bell kept on talking to me even though there was all this activity. I later learned that Washington lives with crisis and catastrophes daily. So our interview was conducted /with/ that atmosphere around us.

M: Was it just you and the Attorney General?

C: Just the Attorney General and I, and his aide, a guy named Terry Adamson. Then, after we had agreed on it, we arranged...we already had the arrangements to go see Senator Eastman, /but/ I wasn't sure the Attorney General was going to be able to go 'cause all this stuff was happening. "No," he said, "Let's go." And so we went and got in his car. I sat in the back seat, he sat in the front; security on my side, armed. We had to go out of a certain back exit from the Department of Justice building, because again, the Moslem, the Hanafi thing, nobody knew quite what to do expect. The phone was ringing in the car, and I was kind of new to that kind of thing.

We got to the Senate Office Building, and the Judge wanted to smoke a cigarette. He didn't have any, I didn't have any, I don't smoke cigarettes. So we went to the basement of the Senate Office Building and the Judge was very...he is a very active guy, he walks real fast. So we went down there, and he finally found his cigarette machine. The security guard was getting very nervous running up and down the hall looking for a cigarette machine. He didn't have any money so I loaned him a couple of quarters to get his cigarettes. He puts the money in the machine, and the machine wouldn't give him any cigarettes. He got mad, and he kicked the machine. You know, when do you see an Attorney General kicking a machine?

M: /Laughs/

C: He didn't get it, and I got my money back. We went upstairs, him without the cigarettes. We walked in to see Senator Eastman. Eastman is a big, tall, thin, distinguished-looking senator who smokes a cigar that's as long as... gee, it must be almost as long as a ruler. He's got that big cigar and he's leaning back in his desk, and the Judge slips into his southern talk and says, "Senator, this here is 'Castilio'."

M: /Laughs/

C: "And Jimmy and I, we done picked him to head the Immigration Service. 'Shore' would like your support." And the Senator, he looks at me, and he sort of shakes my hand and sits down. And he says, "Well, now, 'Castilio', what'ch ya'll going to do about the Mexicans?"

M: /Laughs/

C: That was the first question.

M: What did you say? /Laughs/

C: I said, "Well, it depends on what the problem is." And we went through all that. And then, right as we were getting started, the telephone rings and Judge Bell had to leave the room for another emergency with the Hanafi. I believe the mayor of Washington was locked in his office or something. And so, then it was just me and the Senator. Then he asked me questions about George Meany. He said, "What do you think about Meany saying that there are nine million Mexicans here, and that if we deported them all, we could get jobs for the nine million Americans who are unemployed?" I said, "Well, I don't agree with that." He said, "Good, 'cause I don't agree with that, either." And we talked for a bit.

Finally, the Judge came back and we settled it. The Judge says, "What

do you think, Senator?" And the Senator /says/, "Well, I'll vote for him. He's got some problems in his Civil Rights record, but I think that's all straightened out now. That was a long time ago." See, my FBI report indicated that I had led demonstrations to integrate theaters in San Antonio, Texas, when I was 20. I was the head of the Civil Rights group in San Antonio. I was leading Civil Rights demonstrations to integrate downtown San Antonio theaters, which was, you know, the time that the demonstrations, the sit-ins and all that /were taking place/. Well, I was the leader of that in San Antonio in 1960. So they had all that in my FBI record. And Eastman said, "Well, you know, we can understand, he was young then." And he approved, and that gave me all the votes of the Democrats. And then we had to go see Thurmond.

M: When did you become aware that you had an FBI record?

C: I knew about it before. They had to do that to get me on the Advisory Committee; they had to do that check.

M: Is that when you became aware that they had this information on you?

C: Yeah. But actually, I didn't know they had it way back since I was in college.

M: That surprised you?

C: Kind of. But at that point, we were getting to where we believed everybody had a record, if they'd done anything, so it wasn't that surprising. I was glad they didn't have everything on it. /Laughs/ I mean nothing subversive, just everything.

Then I went to see Senator Thurmond. You know, Thurmond is a big Republican, the Minority Leader in the Judiciary Committee. We walk in

and again the Judge does the same thing about, you know, "Senator, this here is 'Castilio'. We done picked him to head up Immigration. Jimmy and I 'shore' would like your support. We already got Senator Eastman's support, and we'd like to know what you think about it." And the Senator says, "Well, if ya'll 're all for him, I'm for him. You got my vote." And that was the end of it.

M: That's it?

C: I had the votes of the Republicans and Democrats. Then we had to go through the formality of the Texas Delegation, Benson and Tower, but those were pretty definite. There was no problem there at all. While we were with Thurmond, he made it a point to ask the Judge to stick around a little bit longer if he could, so he could talk to another "good ol' boy" who worked in his office. Nothing to do with my appointment, of course, but... We had the time to do it, and of course, the Senator almost always has his wishes listened to at the very least. So, the Attorney General said, "Of course." And so the Senator calls in this "good ol' boy" who works for him, a young white guy about 40 years old, who according to the Senator would be a real addition to the work force at the Department of Justice, a bright young lawyer.

And so the Attorney General interviews him on the spot, gets his name, a little bit of background on him. Then we walk out. And as we walk out, the Attorney General hands me a little slip of paper with that lawyer's name and address and phone number on it and tells me that it's up to me now. So, I coulda had him for my staff.

M: He was asking you to take him on?

C: Oh, nothing is ever that direct in Washington.

M: /Laughs./

C: Obviously, they weren't going to look into it further. And the Senator said, "You ought to be happy you wasn't there with Senator Kennedy. He might've had nine of 'em to look at." It's like Austin. When you're there, they'll take advantage of the fact that you're there, to ask you to look into something or to interview somebody else for the job. And I quickly learned that one reason that mexicanos don't get jobs in Washington is that we don't have anybody in Washington. You know, it's a chicken and egg: you don't have anybody, so you don't get anybody. But you never had anybody, so, you know, how are you going to get anybody?

And so, that was the process. After that, the hearing itself is a formality. And I was told to go there with nothing--no paper, no documents, no material. If I wanted to write anything on a piece of paper, to carry only my name, my birthdate, and my very, very, very, very basic biographical data written on one piece of paper--period!

M: What was the purpose of that?

C: If you carry a notebook, a folder, like a big black book (a briefing book it's called), that book can be subpoenaed by anyone, you know, by the Senators holding the hearing. They can ask you for your briefing book, then you can go on for questions forever. So you can study your briefing book, but don't take it with you. And what had happened was, they had taken the Attorney General's book. I think he'd even had several volumes, and they subpoenaed his when he was up for confirmation, so his confirmation took something like three weeks...questioning all day long. But if they don't have your briefing book, they don't know what your questions are, the ones you're prepared for. And since you're new,

you can say, "Well, I don't know, I'm going to study that question."

You can get away with that when you're just up for confirmation, you can't get away with that later.

So, the hearing was a formality. Senator Benson said so many nice things about me; Senator Kennedy said some really nice things about me; John Tower even was complimentary. I had some questions from Senator Wallop and a few other Senators, but basically the hearing went in less than an hour. And that was it!

M: No tough questions?

C: Well, "What do you think about this or that?" On a few of them I said, "I'm inclined to disagree with this view or agree with that view. But I would like to study it more, 'cause I'm not yet in office. Once I'm there, I'm sure I'll get more and better information."

M: Any questions about the fact that you were of Mexican background and you'd have to deal with Mexican illegals?

C: Not from the Senators. Those were all from the press. Reston, especially, asked me that, could I be fair. And a few other people asked me that. New York Times asked me that, Time Magazine asked me that, and some of the national press asked me the same questions. But the senators themselves never brought that up. The senators themselves were very, very smooth about all this. Course, they go through this all the time.

And, after that, it was mostly formalities, swearing-in. I only regret one thing about the process, and I've written an article about that, that I entitled, "I Wished I Had Used the Gideon." On the morning of the swearing-in, which was the 13th of May in '77, my family was up there at the Quality Inn off of Thomas Circle in Washington, D.C.

I thought that it would be better for me to go to the White House for the swearing-in ceremony with the Gideon Bible as the Bible I would use for the swearing-in rather than one of the White House Bibles or a family Bible, which I didn't bring up. I thought the Gideon would better symbolize what an Immigration Commissioner is all about, dealing with strangers and travelers and sojourners. I thought it would've been a great touch. But I discussed it with a few people, and they said, "No, no. The press might pick it up and then you'll be upstaging the President." Or, "There'll be other people sworn in the same time as you and you don't wanna attract media attention, except to the fact that you've been named." Further, you know, the usual things about, "It's never been done," and all this business. I was talked out of it, and I didn't do it. Now I wish I had. I think it would've been the right touch. At the time I didn't realize though how much of a right touch it would've been, and I didn't know enough about all this other stuff. Now, I think I would know much better.

M: How was the ceremony?

C: Oh, it was good. The President came out and swore us in, me and Graciela Olivárez, and the guy in charge of the GSA. And it was a good...well, you know the way those things go in the Rose Garden. My family was up, it was a great occasion for us. My father went up to the White House. It was good. I wore my new suit /chuckle/, another new suit. It was a beautiful day at Washington, D.C. I was sworn in, went afterwards to the Immigration Office for a little while. Then we took the family on a quick vacation to New York City, and that was it.

M: Did the President say anything special related to your job on that

occasion or related to your own background?

C: The President said that I was getting one of the jobs that was as difficult as any in Washington, including his own. And that not only was it one of the most difficult jobs in the country, but that he was very glad I was getting it because of my background, 'cause he thought the sensitivity, in his words, and knowledge of Mexican Americans would be very helpful in dealing with the others coming in; and that the administrative background as Comptroller would be very helpful. And he was very, very generous in his comments, I thought. He didn't have to be. He could've just said, "These are important posts which are being filled today. I'm delighted to have very qualified people." He went beyond that in my case.

M: To what extent was he preoccupied at that point with the problems of immigration?

C: I think he was just getting into it. He had a Task Force going, he had studies committees going, and he had a special White House group that was studying the problem. And he was reading the documents. His handwritten notations appeared all over those early documents. He was giving it a good bit of time, in terms of a President's time. He was actually looking at documents and stuff, coming up with options, and really devoting a lot of energy to it.

M: Had you talked to the President before that ceremony?

C: Not, really. We'd met on some occasions at functions, but I'd not really had long conversations with him on the subject. I'd been in on the meetings, of course, during the campaign when the issue would come up. But the thing that was furthest from my mind at all of the campaign

meetings and everything else was ever getting involved with Immigration. I had thought about things like HUD, HEW, all kind of other stuff--even ambassadorships. But never immigration. So there I was.

M: Then you took over the agency. What was the reaction within the agency?

C: Of course, the official formal reaction is always, "We'll work with the President's appointee, we're glad you're here, we're eager to help as /much as/ we can." But of course, the actual reaction was... You know, these were career bureaucrats, and I was the new element. They'd outlasted a lot of new ones before and they knew all the ways to keep with their own old policies. And every administration builds up its own momentum: that is, there was a view that the General was right, the focus should be on aggressive border policy aimed at lots and lots more emphasis on enforcement. That was a very, very strong view within the service. So I had to find my allies very quickly, early on, and issue some orders relatively early on what I wanted done. So I did that the same afternoon that I was sworn in.

M: What did you do?

C: I issued orders to start working on the backlogs of the people who were legal immigrants but weren't getting service. I moved very quickly on that. On the very same afternoon /that I was sworn in/, I issued these orders. I'd even had the orders prepared in advance by an old-timer there who agreed with me, Saul Eisenstein. He was then the head of Examinations, the big section that dealt with legal immigration, primarily. So, Saul had worked up these plans for me, and I signed them right after I was sworn in. And that was the order then. It gave a very clear direction to the agency that I wanted service as well as

enforcement. And that order didn't sit well with a lot of people, because they wanted the first emphasis to be on enforcement.

M: Did you get any direct feedback about it?

C: Oh, yeah. Within a week I was embroiled in all the debates about enforcement and service, and that went on through the whole time. And it's still going on. Enforcement had always been the highest, highest priority, and this made it clear that I wanted another priority as well.

M: What form did this reaction take within the agency?

C: Well, they were the usual bureaucratic in-fighting, where things just take forever to get done. You can ask for an opinion or a study and it'll take six months to complete it, or three months, and the first thing you know the study concludes the exact opposite of what you had instructed it to do. Or people can ask for legal opinions to find out if something is legal. That'll kill another three, four months. Or people can say there's no money, and then you have to find the money. Or they can say, "We'd like to hire qualified people," but none are qualified. It never took direct opposition, almost never. Of course, that's all internal bureaucratic in-fighting. In addition, some members of the staff, both national and local level, started leaking stories to the press about things I was doing that they disagreed with. They immediately started telling the press.

M: Like what?

C: Oh, that they thought I was giving the country away to Mexicans, or that I was spending too much money on low priorities and I should be spending money on enforcement, that they were being shortchanged--all sorts of things about me personally and about my priorities. It was all a way

to get at me.

M: Did you encounter any opposition that you felt was based on the fact that you were a Chicano?

C: Oh, yeah. I've always had that, and I guess. I always just take it for granted. You know, there were little jokes about how now everybody will have to learn how to speak Spanish in the Central Office or how you won't get promoted if you don't have a Spanish surname. Or, "Castillo is setting up the Mexican corner of the Central Office." Just all sorts of little things that would trickle back to me, snotty little things. Every now and then I'd get these really nasty letters, but I've gotten those all my life, ever since I've been in public office.

M: What kind of nasty letters?

C: You know, Klu Klux Klan type of garbage about, you know, "Go back to Mexico or we'll kick your ass back," or something less friendly than that.

M: Anonymous letters?

C: Some were anonymous. Most were signed, but no address. Every now and then we'd find swastikas in some of the elevators. I got a lot of putrid mail. I've always gotten that. I always assume I'm going to get that if I'm combatting racism or bigotry or trying to deal with something that's not...

M: Have you saved these letters?

C: No, I usually throw them away. I got 'em. My staff would look at 'em, usually throw them away. Pretty putrid, most of 'em.

M: You should've saved them.

C: I used to get 'em at the Comptroller's Office and I used to get 'em at the Commissioner's Office. Sometimes the staff would look at 'em, mostly.

We'd throw 'em away, they'd just pile up the stuff. They don't make for good reading.

M: /Laughs/.

C: They might from a historical point of view; but from a what I wanna get done point of view, they're not.

M: Sure. I've gotten some of those myself. /Chuckles/ Did you go on a tour of INS Centers shortly after you got sworn in?

C: I was sworn in on a Friday, and by the next Tuesday I was down in Los Angeles and San Diego. Before the week was out I was already down there visiting my own offices and talking with people and so on. As an example of how HOT the climate was at the time, I was sworn, as I said, that Friday, and by the next week, my news conference in San Diego... We had a room, a big room, filled with reporters and press people. Must've been over a hundred press people at that one news conference, all asking what I was going to do to stop the invasion. Just an enormous overflow of people, very upset, very excited, demanding action. Toward the end of the tour, it was not as hot. But I immediately took off to the border to visit the offices. I wanted to see things on my own. It was very enlightening.

M: Tell me what you saw.

C: Well, I saw the obvious things. I went into the Los Angeles District Office and I found my staff there using manual typewriters that were ancient; adding machines that weren't produced anymore, they were so old; really antique type machines; thousands of people standing around, waiting, trying to get in the office. It was real early in the morning. I found no one able to answer the phone--two, three days to get a phone call answered; mail that couldn't be answered 'cause they couldn't even get around to

opening it, it was just so jammed. And all of these enormous, enormous administrative problems--no automation, no automation even though there were hundreds of thousands of files; and a lot of people that didn't speak Spanish or other languages, who were dealing with these other national groups. The toilet that was used for the people we were detaining and deporting was right in the Federal Building, and they were port-a-cans, in the building--just one stinky, stinky place! So, I immediately ordered a lot of changes there, and we eventually got 'em, most of 'em. You couldn't imagine the smell and the stench that an indoor use of port-a-cans /can have/.

And then I went to the border, and again the same sort of hot, hot climate, everybody upset and angry and demanding action.

M: In San Diego?

C: Yeah. Demanding deportation. Then I continued that pace. I travelled 50, 60 percent of the time. I was constantly showing up in an office, sometimes announced, sometimes unannounced. But I was always calling or visiting my own offices to see what was going on. It was really helpful.

M: Didn't you get treated rudely once, one of those times when you went unannounced?

C: Well, yeah, I was treated rudely or badly several times when I showed up unannounced, once at an airport, sometimes at District Offices. I just sorta walked in with the crowd, they didn't know who I was at that point. I just sat there and tried to get an appointment, and they wouldn't see me because I didn't have an appointment. I wasn't dressed all that well, apparently, and they didn't know who I was, so they just told me to sit. And I just had to sit and be treated like everybody else. And that was

good, because that way I was able to learn how everybody else was treated. I didn't want to know how the dignitaries were treated, I know how they're treated. I wanted to know how the average person was treated. So I just sat there at the District Office until finally one of my aides couldn't take it any longer and he had to tell them who I was. But I walked into offices all over the place, unannounced. Later on they knew, they kinda got around to expecting it and they were able to phone ahead.

One of my most delightful visits was one I had at 4 a.m. one morning at the El Paso bridge, the Bridge of the Americas. I'd flown in from somewhere, I landed in El Paso at 3 a.m., and there were a couple of border patrolmen there to meet me. /They/ were going to drive me to the hotel 'cause I had some meetings in the morning. Well, on the way to the hotel, I told 'em, "Let's go to the bridge." And they said, "Yeah, but they're not waiting for you." And I said, "I know that. And don't call ahead." So they didn't call ahead, we just showed up at the bridge. And I had a very delightful, short visit with a couple of inspectors that were sitting there drinking coffee waiting for the traffic. And we talked. I learned a lot about how you maintain the bridges, what they thought was important, and so on. I don't think they'll ever be visited by another Commissioner at 4 a.m. /Chuckle/

M: Did they recognize you?

C: Very quickly. When you sit there, who's going to show up at 4 a.m. with two border patrolmen, you know, coat and tie and all. My aides didn't go for that. /Chuckle/ I'd been with the border patrolmen in San Diego all night long, I went all night to different places. /There are/ many, many all-night trips where you leave Washington or leave Los Angeles at

midnight. You get to Washington at six a.m. and then go to testify at a hearing at nine a.m., go through a whole day's schedule that way.

M: How'd you manage to survive that?

C: I still live that way. I know how to sleep on planes. I can pass out very well in a plane. I can sleep in this chair, or it would be a lot easier on that chair /you're sitting on/ because it's an arm chair. But I can sit in just a regular, almost straight-back chair, and put my head back; and in a matter of five, ten minutes, I'd be sound asleep. I'll wake up fifteen minutes later or an hour later or three hours later and I'll be refreshed, as refreshed as you can get. Now, obviously, you're not as rested as you would be if you'd gotten a regular night's sleep, in a regular bed and all. But I lived that pace, that style, for the whole two and a half years. Now I'm living it again here, where I make trips that take all night. So I don't miss the night, I don't miss the travel. If I were doing it again, I'd fly first class more because you get more space and you can sleep even more, you can be even more rested. But that's about the only thing different I'd do; I would change the travel. I'd simply go first class, so I could get a bigger seat to sleep in.

/PAUSE/

M: Last night when we left off, you were telling me about the on site visits you made to certain INS Centers. You mentioned that you went to San Diego early in your term of office and you spent a whole night there with border patrol agents. Could you tell me about that experience?

C: Well, I did that on several occasions. I did it early on and I did it very late in my tour of duty. The first time I did it, it was a very weird, strange feeling, because what you want to do is see everything you

can. So you go there and you're put on a helicopter. There's just a handful of helicopters. You're up in the helicopter and you can see all these people who are trying to cross. Then the thing you're supposed to do is to take the helicopter's spotlight and find Mexicans who are trying to cross--shine the flashlight on 'em. That way you sort of tell the people on land where to go catch 'em. It's sort a like a herding or something. And it's a very weird sensation when you get that spotlight and you start looking for people under bushes and things. That's really something because you know you're in effect stalking human beings and you're part of this great big international drama. It's very strange, the sensation you get when you're up there.

Later you can get down on land, and we did. You can sit on one of the hill tops there and look through these infra-red scopes, these night scopes. /It's/ really dark out there, and these things are able to sense heat, so you can see people, you can see that that area in front of you is just filled with people. And again, by making those detections, by using that equipment you can tell how many /people are out there/, and you can begin to tell the border patrol where to go to apprehend the large groups. You're out there in the dark or you're up in the sky and you're looking down with that big floodlight, and you can see them. You pick up all these people and you put 'em in the jeeps or you put 'em in the vans or whatever they're using at the time, and you take 'em back to your central facility. Then eventually, and usually very shortly after, they're deported to Mexico. And then, of course, a short time later they're trying again. So, you know, it's all an unbelievable exercise.

Of course, the press had lots and lots of reporters down there often

compared it to Viet Nam, but I think that's too much of an exaggeration. There isn't the bloodshed and violence of Viet Nam. There is the same kind of game of people sneaking back and forth and going through the lines.

M: Do you remember having any feelings about the people themselves as they were being apprehended, anything that you remember about how you felt at that moment?

C: Well, yeah. I'd mentioned this once to a reporter from the LA Times who then printed it as a way to give me a bad time about policy being too lax, from his perspective. I told him that sometimes when you apprehend all these people and you're trying to enforce the law, what you're really doing, even though you're enforcing the laws, is you really manage to make yourself feel like a real shit. Because you're deporting, in most cases, young men and women, primarily men, and you know their sole reason for coming is work. They're not really a security threat, they're not really a criminal element at all. So you have very bad feelings often when you do this. What you try to do then, and what most of the people on the line try to do, is to say that, "It's my job," and just avoid feelings, which is probably the only way they can live with it.

M: Did you yourself participate in apprehending people down there?

C: Yeah, I took part in every step of the process, or tried to. I feel like you can't sympathize with either person, the one being apprehended or the one apprehending, until you go down and take part in it. So, I went and took part in it. I was up there on the helicopter; I had the scope; I was at the center where we had the sensors, the equipment /to/ detect people coming across, either on seismic basis or through vibrations on the ground or on heat basis. I also spoke with literally hundreds of

undocumented as well. And I never once, in all the time I was with undocumented, never once felt threatened.

You know, when I was in a room that was full of undocumented, maybe 40 or 50 of them and me and one security officer, I never felt like they were going to attack me or I would be worried or grab my wallet or whatever. I just never once felt nervous. And I was, in some cases, in very demonstrative groups all over the country. You walk in, and they all want to know if you can help 'em, that the coyote* misled 'em, took all their money, and now they're broke and apprehended in San Diego or El Paso or New York City. What can they do to get their money back? Of course, they can't do anything. And others ask you for a cigarette, others ask you if you can help 'em in, and others ask you if you'd just please deport 'em so they can go home. Then, in some cases, they complain about the food or the facility or whatever. I was often around 'em.

Just recently, when I went to Venezuela, I did the same thing. I went back and visited with all the academics, the policy makers, the government functionaries, and others. Then I went down and visited the place where they hold 'em.

M: Where did you go?

C: In Caracas. I went down to the sotano, the basement of the Immigration Office. I visited the Immigration Office facilities, but I also went down and got right into the facility where they hold the people.

M: You spoke to some of them?

C: Yeah, I spoke to a bunch of 'em, but in that case they were Colombians, Ecuadorians, Peruvians, and a lot of Venezuelans who had lost their ID Cards. They were being held because they couldn't prove they were

* Nickname for alien smuggler

Venezuelan yet. I learned a lot from talking to those people.

M: Any memorable cases that you remember talking to individuals who may have told you about their circumstances? Any particular individuals who stand out in your mind?

C: Well, a lot of 'em sort of just blur after you speak with so many, you get kind of a blur. There was one group, though, in Chicago, that was kind of interesting because it was so spunky. It was a group of women. They'd been apprehended at some factory, and we were talking. They'd brought in their lunch, tortillas and beans and what not. I don't know where they got 'em in Chicago. I was talking with the ladies about how they'd been treated and things of that sort, and one of them said, "You're never going to catch me here again." I said, "Why's that? We're deporting you. You mean you're not coming back?" She said, "No, no, I just mean you're never going to catch me here again." /Laughs/ And then all the other women just had a ball explaining that to me--the obvious that she wasn't going to be coming back and be apprehended, /but/ she was going to come back.

And then there was a group here in Houston once who included a young man, I think he was a Central American. He told me that the place where he worked here in Houston was a construction company and many of the workers were undocumented, but that the patrón really liked the undocumented because when it came to work overtime or under hard conditions the undocumented stayed until they were chased off the job. And he was real proud of that. He said that the American workers would go home at the first chispas, drops of rain, where the undocumented would work until they were forced, told to go home. He said that they were more honorable people than the Americans,

because they worked harder and therefore they were better. And he was very, very proud. I asked him why someone as articulate as he had not studied law or something. He said he wanted to, but there was no money, and he was hoping to make enough money here to study a profession. I don't know if he made it or not; we deported him.

And then, of course, there's the deportation of children, young children, 14 years old, that age group. I've interviewed some of them as well.

M: You remember any particular anecdote about conversations with little kids like that?

C: Well, shortly before I left, I made a one-week trip to Mexico City with my family. I took my son, who was then 12, and my daughter, who was 15, and my wife, who was about my age. We took one of these regular flights from Houston to Mexico City. It was kinda fascinating, because when the plane stopped in San Antonio, it was met by a border patrol detention officer who brought on three young men and some young women as well. The young women were a little bit older. The officer escorted them on the plane and gave their tickets to the stewardess. That was the total amount of security. They sat toward the back of the plane, and for all anyone knew, they were just regular passengers. Obviously they didn't speak very much English. I went back and spoke with them. The oldest was 17, the youngest I believe was 13, the other was about 14. We conversed for a good while about why they'd come, what they had done, and so on. They'd come somehow from Colombia; I think they were from Medellín. They had managed, through a coyote, who had somehow gotten the family to help, to take this bright young man, the 17-year-old, who took responsibility for the two youngest.

They made it from Medellín, through Mexico, all the way to San Antonio. At the time that he was apprehended, the 17-year-old was working full time, just a regular man's job somewhere in a construction site, and the kids were enrolled in school. He'd already enrolled the two younger ones in school and was maintaining them. He was just running the household as a 17-year-old. He was a very impressive 17-year-old, the kind of young man that you'd REALLY like to have on your team, or working for you or with you. I'm sure that that young man, if he wants to, will be coming back, or will be an important figure in Colombia--if he isn't killed or lost somewhere. That was a very capable young man! They had just moved right into the San Antonio economy. I'm sure that in another year or two those kids would've been doing very well in school.

M: When you say that that was the extent of the security, would it have been possible to get off the plane after the border patrol agent left?

C: Well, I'm sure they could've made a mad dash and somehow made it through the back door of the plane where they load the food or something of that sort. I'm sure they could have, had they tried. And who knows, maybe they would've been successful. But it would've been hard. But these are not those kinds of individuals, these people that we apprehend. They didn't have those instincts.

There are only 12 cells in the whole United States for all undocumented aliens, and at no time during the entire two and a half years that I was there, were all 12 cells filled. We kept the people in dormitory facilities. And when those 12 cells, or when a few of them were filled, it was only because someone had a contagious disease, or someone had a psychological problem, or someone had an illness, /and we wanted to keep him/ away from

the others. In a few cases, the individual was so young, or was probably homosexual, and you wanted to separate him for his own protection. But at no time did we have all 12 cells filled because the people were dangerous.

M: Twelve individual cells throughout the country?

C: Through the whole United States, that the immigration service had.

M: Are they spread out in different detention centers?

C: Well, about half of 'em are in El Paso, but El Paso has La Tuna, which is a place where you can acutally put people who were criminal, criminally intent or inclined. Then there are a couple of 'em in El Centro, California, a couple in Los Fresnos, and one or two in New York City. And that's it.

M: That's amazing. I think very few people know about that.

C: Yeah, most people think that somehow there's great security at any one moment. They outnumber us by, you know, tremendous percentages, and yet they are relatively mild mannered. Although I'm told they've had more since then, we had few instances of anyone being attacked or people overpowering the guard or something of that sort. The food at the facilities was kind of interesting because in El Paso and at Los Fresnos and El Centro we often had Mexican food. We had chiles, tortillas, and it was good food. When I went to these facilities, I almost always ate there. Again, I wanted to see what the people were eating, I wanted to eat what they ate. I wanted to test it that way. It's not good to have people tell you, "We have a great diet." It's better to just eat it yourself and you'll have a better sense of how great it is. Actually, it was good; it was very filling. And I say that even though I'm no gourmet; I eat whatever is in front of me. But I liked that diet they had, tortillas, and picadillo, and in a few cases I had fish. Lots of food. Some of them

gained weight, even in the short time they were held there.

M: What reaction did you get from Border Patrol people in those detention centers when you would eat the food or mingle with the undocumented people?

C: Well, by and large the response was good because they were convinced they were providing service in a humane way. They had read all these press accounts of attacks and brutality and so on, and most of 'em were convinced that if I simply went there and saw it myself and experienced it myself, that I would be convinced that they weren't abusing anyone. So, in most instances they were very pleased that I showed up there and that I ate the food and was able to see for myself what was going on. Of course, in a few cases, some of the border patrolmen would go ahead and take advantage of the visit and ask for more money or more equipment or whatever. That's to be expected of anybody who was in a situation like that.

M: I'm particularly interested in any anecdotes that you might have about your visits to the El Paso Detention Center with undocumented people as well as with INS personnel there.

C: Well, I guess the longer I'm away, the more the instances start to blur. I had lots of experiences. The El Paso detention facility, when I first saw it, had lots of problems in it. There simply wasn't administrative space. They were just really crowded. So I ordered a change, an improvement in it. But because there was some opposition to it at different levels within the Immigration Service, it took over a year to actually do something that I had ordered done. Because some of the people said, "You know, that money should be spent on something else." So, we had a very hard time actually doing something that lots of folks wanted done--not just myself, but a lot of folks within the Service. We finally got it done, and that

was a very big step. The facility was much improved when they got this administrative building, but it was not easy to get.

The other reality was that the Border Patrol in El Paso, both at the start and then even more so at the end of the tour, was living in horrendous facilities, just horrible facilities. These facilities were World War II-type buildings that were set up to accommodate a work force that was one third the size of the work force they now had. So there was a lot of crowding within the Border Patrol.

There was also one occasion during which one of the border patrolmen there had taken the time to sculpt a replica of the border fence. You know, the famous border fence? And on it he'd put two figures who were trying to climb over, and they gave that to me on one trip. I have it around here somewhere. It was a fascinating little piece of work, and someday I'm going to find it in one of these boxes and post it here as a reminder of what we're dealing with.

I also had some discussions, of course, on the black bridge and how it might be closed. I remember one long discussion on what might be done to close the black bridge, both so that people wouldn't fall off of it and kill themselves or hurt themselves, and also so that it wouldn't be used as an immediate source of entry. And, of course, on another occasion there was a long debate about who was responsible for maintenance of the bridges. You see, the international bridges in the United States, unlike bridges in most countries, are not as completely under the jurisdiction of any one single agency. In most countries it's a combination of agencies under one head. In the United States, it could be a private owner; it could be a combination of the Boundary Commission, Treasury Department, the

Immigration Service, the City , and a whole lot of other groups. As a result of this lack of definition in the United States, sometimes it was very hard to even figure out who was in charge of cleaning up the bridge, and up to what point, and which parts of the building. How do you make renovations to a bridge? It's a very complicated issue. At first, it looks easy. It's easier when a private individual owns it or when one federal agency has it. Then you can make a decision fairly quickly. But when it's a combined ownership, it gets very hard to figure out.

Of course, in El Paso I had discussions with many, many groups from many, many sectors of the community, every imaginable group: the mayor's office, the city government, the bishop, other private groups, the academics, the Texas Council on the Humanities office, which was doing some work there with Professor Ellwyn Stoddard. That was an interesting program they had on the fence. And I dealt with a number of cases that were kind of amazing. There was one that had to do with a priest who was apprehended, and everybody was embarrassed by it. There were just all sorts of allegations. I don't know where it is now; the case has been going on for a long time.

M: He's been ordered deported.

C: He's been finally ordered deported?

M: He's under appeal.

C: Yeah, because he had been involved in all sorts of...he was constantly attacking us from the pulpit, calling the border patrolmen all sorts of nasty names, /saying that/ we abused people. He was apprehended one night bringing someone over who had no papers, then there was even a question about his papers. Bishop Flores was very helpful in trying to deal with those issues fairly and trying to get to the truth of it.

We had that one instance where the officers in the Immigration Service stopped the buses coming over during a special program of raids, bus stops, and found that a lot of people on the buses had no papers. So they started deporting 'em. They deported them all through one bridge, caused a traffic jam at that bridge, and the traffic jam lead to demonstrations. The demonstrations led to protests, and the first thing we knew, the bridges had been closed because of the demonstrations. And then they closed not just the first bridge, they went to other bridges as well. Then we ended with a very serious question of what to do. The Mexican police were getting ready to use force if need be to evict protestors; our police on our side were reluctant to get near the bridge, to go beyond a certain point. The Border Patrol in that instance played it very quietly, and simply collected forces and stayed out of sight behind the bridge. They weren't visible to the demonstrators; we had 'em there, but they were held more in ready than visibly present. It took almost the whole weekend, but it might have become even more tense had not a very unfortunate thing happened. One woman was somehow trying to drive through the crowd, panicked, and ran over a 12-year-old girl, killed her; and /that/ defused the whole thing in a very sad way. I don't know what would've happened had that woman not panicked. The violence could've been turned more outward than inward, and there could've been a much more serious incident, in terms of more people getting hurt.

M: How did that defuse the whole thing?

C: Well, people suddenly began to say, "What are we doing here?" and, "Isn't this pretty horrible?" And then the authorities were more willing and more eager to disperse people. Other people got worried that maybe they would get hurt or something. I don't know, it just...it demoralized

everybody. It was a very sad accident. Another young boy was hurt, but she was killed.

I think what happens when a death occurs is, people... You know, had it been a death caused by or a death that was occasioned by an action of the Border Patrol or of a U.S. police officer, then there could've been more demonstrations and much more action. There were, of course, protests that were immediately linked to this that had nothing to do with the Immigration Service. For instance, there were people that showed up with signs asking for better treatment of taxidriviers, and there was the Marxists group that showed up right away, demonstrating.

M: The Revolutionary Communist Party?

C: Yeah. They showed up right away with their leaflets, blasting imperialism, and the 23 de Septiembre group showed up with their literature. My guess is that if the radical groups had any organizing ability (luckily for us they don't) , they could cause one HELL of a mess along the border of the United States and Mexico. They still might, but up to now they've demonstrated very poor organizing ability. If they had any sense and any ability, they could've put us in a very bad way--us meaning the entire border.

It's very easy to close the bridge, it's very easy to sabotage that whole process. It takes almost no brains and very little planning, and you don't have to injure people. You know, we worry about terrorism all over the world, but one grenade dropped on a bridge at 3:00 a.m. on a delayed reaction would put the whole bridge out of commission and would really, really, really hurt the economy of El Paso. It wouldn't take much to really hurt the economy of El Paso. And all you have to do is put one little explosive there. It doesn't even have to be at a place where anyone gets

hunt. People don't realize how vulnerable we are to terrorism on either side, or from radicals of either country. We developed emergency plans while I was in the service, to deal with demonstrations, riots, and take overs of bridges and immigration service facilities. We developed these as a result of some of the activities that took place along the border.

M: They didn't have any contingency plans before that?

C: We had not made them before, in any formal way.

M: Chapman hadn't developed anything?

C: No, there was nothing formal. We just started formalizing these throughout the whole country. Because you have to decide at what point you bring in the U.S. Attorney, or the relationship with the Sheriff, or the relationship with Customs, or all this sort of stuff. And the plans were pretty much completed by the time I left, and I'm sure they are by now. We had some problems on the northern Canadian border with the U.S. Attorney there. Some of the U.S. attorneys said they didn't have authority to do certain things. Also, they have a slightly different problem up there because there people don't have visas to cross, whereas you do on the southern border, and the traffic flows are different. But by guess is that we'll have to constantly pay attention to this question of crossings and security, and link them, and hopefully develop a lot more crossing points, a lot more places where people can cross, both for access and for security. It makes a lot of sense to have four or five places where people can cross that aren't nearly as heavily used as the current ones, that could easily be used in case there were problems with the current ones, so that you could switch over. It would even help to have some temporary structures tested that could easily be swung into play, some of these pontoon bridge-type

arrangements that can easily be developed by the army, just as a way to handle cargo, to separate the cargo from the people. It would make a lot of sense in terms of traffic flow, to separate those two.

M: I talked to you shortly after the demonstrations at the bridges there in Juárez and El Paso. The demonstrations were in March of '79. You mentioned to me that that weekend was very frustrating for you, that you were on the phone almost the entire time, you were talking to all kinds of people on the spot, and it was just very frustrating to keep a lid on the thing so it wouldn't explode. Can you tell me about the conversations that you had with people like Ray Salazar and others on the spot?

C: Well, the interesting thing was that I never talked with Ray. We had telegrams from Ray, but his telegrams didn't arrive till the weekend was over. I spoke more with our people. My thought in doing that was very simple. It was my view then--and I think now in retrospect, a correct view--that it's better not to mix the lines of authority. The people on the spot have responsibility for handling it, and I had a lot of faith in the people that were there. So I didn't want to go over their heads, so to speak, or to go around them and speak with local officials they were dealing with, because then you increase the chances of getting crossed signals. So I was dealing directly with Stayley, the head of the border patrol there, and with the people at the bridge, Charlie Pérez's group. I was talking with them, and of course with our other regional office as well. They were meeting with the Mexican consul, Gallastegui, and with Mexican officials, the coronels and others, and they were meeting also with local officials. My thought was to keep the lines clear, my direct line was to them. I didn't want to go around them, because I thought, if I

started speaking with other parties, they might be different stories, and I wasn't on the spot. It worked out well that way because I was able to keep in touch, and they were able to tell me what was going on as far as the Mexican side and the U.S. side, and who was where, and where the people were, and we were able to discuss strategy, and other questions. The question was one that took a lot of time. I was in Washington for the first part of the demonstration, but I had agreed a long time ago to have a meeting with my western region staff in Seattle, so sort of in the middle of it I flew to Seattle. I had another one of these late night flights, and met that morning with Seattle and also was on the phone that evening. When you call in people for a Sunday meeting, you better show up; so I showed up. And then, that evening I got the word about the girl being killed. That was a low point in the tour. I was on the phone that evening again. The next morning I was somewhere else. The demonstrations were obviously something that should be prevented and with better laws and better enforcement. I don't blame anybody for them right now. It was just a collection of tense moments that a few people took advantage of. Our latest investigation showed that the leaders of the demonstration were not the ones who were deported, not the ones that we had apprehended.

M: How did you determine that?

C: Well, the people who were raising the most cane were not those who came forward and said they were upset 'cause of the deportation. After we checked, it turned out the demonstrators had been deported a year before, and they clearly were not the kind of people that could immediately show up with Marxist revolutionary literature. And further, some of the people who were there were identified by police officials as the very same people

who had been in the demonstrations here in Houston on 5 de Mayo that ended in eruption and violence and whatnot. Some of the very same people who were involved in that in Houston were also involved in El Paso. They just flew up there as soon as they heard something was up. I'm concerned that this might be repeated because it's so easy to do.

M: Did you have agents mingle in the crowd?

C: No, not on the Mexican side. We didn't want to get ourselves in that kind of problem. We relied very much on the Mexican police. Our concern was that the Mexican police and Army would use force more readily than we would, had the thing gone on much longer. They were prepared to use force. Some of the Mexican officials told us that if they just would have gotten the word, they would have cleared that whole crowd out in a minute. They had the way to do it and the will to do it; they would've had no compunctions about moving everybody out very, very fast. And they were getting in the mood where they were ready to do that. Their method of dispersing crowds and dealing with demonstrations is a lot different than ours. We tend to let people go on and on, and they tend to take very direct action.

M: Did you have any direct communication with Mexico City during the crisis?

C: I don't remember right now, but I think there was one or two calls from Mexico City to our office or to the Embassy asking, "What's going on? We're hearing all these reports from El Paso-Juárez, and the press from Mexico City is running these stories. We want to know what's going on." But I don't recall any really extended conversations. I know the Department of State wanted to know, and I'm sure that was also true for Mexico City. And I think we spoke with Annie Gutiérrez, who was heading up our office in Mexico City, to tell her the problem.

M: I'm wondering how the communication was established between policy makers in Mexico City and the Juárez police, the Juárez military people, and INS personnel in El Paso, so that there was some coordination going on.

C: No, the matter was dealt with... In Mexico the system is a lot clearer than our system. In Mexico, it's very clear: the Consul General is on a direct line to Mexico City and the federal officials are also on a direct line. They have a very clear line of authority, because they're a centralized form of government. So immediately they were acting on behalf of the federal government; and any orders that were different, they would get directly. Whereas in our case, our officials have to go through various departments of the government. Mexico City had very little role in the shaping of policy, and U.S. sections in Mexico City really had very little to do in shaping policy. It's done almost all on the U.S. side and very much on the local level.

M: So it was Gallastegui who was controlling things in Juárez?

C: Gallastegui was the one that was most in touch with us, relaying views of the Mexican government, and helping quail rumors or getting facts straight. And of course, he and the generals were actually deciding what was to be done. Theirs was a lot simpler. Coordination with Mexicans in that instance was quite good; they knew what was going on. Of course, almost all the demonstrations took place on their side. There were some moments that were kind of tense, when people threw the American flag in the river and so on. That made national television and caused a lot of very emotional response. But by and large, the Mexicans contained the demonstrations, and we simply kept ourselves in readiness in case a large group of people did start to storm the bridge. We had the Border Patrol and other enforcement officers

back out of sight, but ready to try to do something.

M: I don't know what information the mayor had.

C: It may have been that one of the precipitating causes of the whole thing was our enforcement policy, the fact that we did deport these people. It may have been that we made a mistake in trying to deport them all through one bridge, at one facility. But it has to be remembered that the immigration officers on the spot were simply obeying the law of the United States on immigration, a law which they find to be as defective as Ray /Salazar/ does. And so I think that Ray's immediate burst of anger at the Immigration Service was really not very productive, really not very helpful. And it probably hurt efforts at coordination, which were desperately needed then, more than they really served any other purpose. So I think the mayor made a mistake right at the start.

It's true that we were the precipitating cause, but it's not true that what we did was anything illegal or even wrong. What the person on the spot did was enforce the immigration law. Ray put himself then in an awkward position of asking us not to enforce the immigration law, which we are sworn to uphold. It was very awkward for us, and I'm sure for him later. I think it would've been better had he immediately moved toward a cooperative stance, /then/ attacked us or the law in private, or later in public. Because clearly the law is in need of revision; it just doesn't make sense. There should be a law that has to do with commuters, that lets people come to places like El Paso every morning to work. People shouldn't have to sneak over here every day and go home every night.

M: Criticism about that situation is that periodically INS cracks down on these commuters, and in this case it was mostly women who were crossing to

El Paso to work as maids, and the maids constitute the weakest sector of the undocumented migrants along the border. INS does this to make a show of force and to let people know that INS won't stand for the violation of U.S. immigration laws, but it picks on the weakest sector. This is one criticism that one hears regarding those periodic crackdowns.

C: Well, it's true that the Service does have these periodic crackdowns and does go toward the buses. The buses are the easiest to work, and you have large group. It's more productive in the sense that you can get more people for less dollars. INS would be ill-advised to go after a more difficult group and spend a lot of money that it doesn't have. I think it's one of the end results of this kind of law, and the officer clearly will go after that kind of individual. It is not a mistake to periodically try to, as they say, "show the flag." /Chuckle/ What's a mistake is the law; the law doesn't make sense. How can you talk about any rational way of enforcing that law? So the INS employee tries to find some way of making it at least look like he's enforcing it.

Now, he knows very well that his big crackdown of Monday will simply result in a lot of people not going to work Monday, but that they'll be at work Tuesday, and certainly Wednesday and Thursday. All his big crackdown will do is just make it a little bit harder, one more obstacle. I think that's really the program that we have--keeping that door half open and throwing up obstacles periodically. Now, just don't ever let it fully open, and don't ever close it, because either one will be a disaster. So, the INS officials have to implement this ridiculous policy.

M: During that conversation that I had with you, I guess it was the spring of 1979, after the demonstrations, you mentioned to me one anecdote about

meeting with a Mexican general. I don't recall where it was, maybe in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. You went to a restaurant, I think, and had a conversation with him about taking care of people who are violating the law. Do you remember that?

C: Well, I think that was about another problem on the border. This was the Lower Rio Grande Valley, if it's the right situation. This particular case involved a U.S. citizen in Mexico who had gone beserk and pulled out a weapon and shot a lot of people on the streets of...I believe it was Matamoros.

M: That's it.

C: I believe it was Matamoros. He had gone there and he'd shot up all these Mexicans. Then, before anybody knew what happened, he was trying to get back into the United States. Well, he made it. The Mexican police were chasing him. He got to the bridge, to the U.S. side, and then as soon as he got there he argued that he could not get deported because he was a U.S. citizen; that if they wanted him, they'd have to file extradition. And the Mexican police said, "You know, he just shot all our people. He should be held for trial in Mexico, and be in jail there while he's waiting." And he argued, "No." So the officers on the bridge called the Sheriff in that community, and he told 'em the man was right--you can't deport a U.S. citizen, you've got to go through formal extradition proceedings, or at least prisoner exchange proceedings. And so the guy had to be released, he was released. And that really upset the Mexicans, because while that may be international law, it nevertheless caused a lot of bad blood.

I went down and met with the general on the Mexican side to explain our thing, and we had a very long meeting. It started in the early

evening with dinner, a few drinks, and it went till early morning, after lots and lots of drinks. The amazing thing was that at the end of the period we were drinking buddies, I guess. But the general was very, very tough. He was the kind of person who had lots of power and was not reluctant to show it. He was telling his officers they'd better stand straight, and telling the barmaids, "You better come sit here with me." Oh, he was very, very tough and rough, and he carried a pistol in his belt, in the front, wore a big white hat, and drove a big cadillac.

At one point we drove up to this bar, and he parked in a no parking zone right in front of the bar in a little bitty street there in that little town. He took up the whole street, illegally, right in front of the sign that says NO PARKING. This security guard came up to him and said, "Sorry sir, you can't park here." And the general said words to the effect that, "¿Sabes con quien hablas, cabrón?" Which is, "You know who you're speaking with, you son of a bitch?" And the security guard said, "No, sir." "You're speaking with a General." And he showed him his pistol. The security guard almost fainted. He said, "You can park anywhere you want sir." And so we did, right in front of the place, and walked right in. That was the behavior for the whole evening. After the first three, four drinks, I reached my limit. I was drinking coke with ice or sprite with ice or having one glass of scotch for three hours, that sort of thing, because I'm not that much of a drinker. These guys just never stopped. It was at least four a.m. before we got back.

I think that the unfortunate thing about this was that the life of a Mexican, the poor Mexican, really isn't worth much, in official terms, to anybody, including the Mexican officials. And certainly the U.S. government

doesn't play up deaths along the border; it isn't big news. We don't have formal protest, government to government; we don't have major incidents as a result of that. The truth is that the Mexican peón has no power either in Mexico or in the United States. So oftentimes what's at issue is the pride of one country as opposed to another, and not so much the life of one citizen. And that incident made it very clear to me that what hurt was the fact that the Mexican officials weren't able to handle the crime. They had sort of been shamed by our not cooperating more fully, at least from their point of view.

M: They were hurt as officials rather than having a concern for the people who were killed?

C: I got that impression. And also it was very clear from the way they treated their own officers, their own men, that there was no great compassion for these persons. These were low-income people in most cases.

When we found the bodies along the border that had washed ashore or in the desert in Arizona, you know, it didn't even make the newspapers in the interior of these states. It might make the border papers, and even there, just inside pages.

M: You mean in Mexico?

C: Or in the United States.

M: But in Mexico, aren't these things played up, really played up in Mexico City?

C: Not really. They're only played up when they become incidents. They don't usually play it up until it becomes an incident, then they really play it up. But by and large the Mexicans who came over as undocumented were often angry at their government, even more angry at their government than at ours. When the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, the Mexican equivalent

of our Secretary of State, Santiago Roel, made a tour of the border, starting in South Texas and going all the way to the San Diego area, he stopped to visit the detention facilities, and he had lots of press and publicity and whatnot. He asked some of the Mexicans who were being held how the Immigration Service was treating them, and how they were being received in the United States and so on.

It was fascinating in that many of them responded to him in public that the real problem was not the United States' treatment of the Mexican national, but was the Mexican government's treatment of the Mexicans; that they were there because the Mexican government had failed to give them jobs, had failed to help them with housing, had failed with food; that if the Mexican government weren't so screwed up, they would be at home. And they were very, very direct, these Mexican workers! I think it upset the Secretary a bit, and it certainly was not what a lot of the press people were waiting to hear. They were really expecting the undocumented to blast the United States for ill treatment. The truth is that most Mexican nationals that we hold have very high opinions of the United States. Even though they are being deported, they would rather stay here, because they have access to work and housing and so on. They want to be home, they want to be Mexican, they want to live with their family, but they're very quick to tell you that they didn't have a choice; and that if they had a choice, they'd be here. And I think it was very disconcerting to hear it on national TV.

M: You mean, these comments were aired on national TV?

C: Yes, some of the reporters were right there taking it all down. He resigned about a week after that. I don't know if that had anything to do

with the resignation, but I do know he resigned about a week after.

M: Going back to your meeting with the General, was the purpose of your meeting with him to explain to him the circumstances of that incident?

C: The purpose was sort of to improve relations and to sort of smooth over the bad feelings that had occurred as a result of the shooting and the result /of the/ legal actions, and it worked. He even gave me his white hat at the end of the drinking marathon. I wore this white hat all the way back to Washington. I had this beautiful white straw hat, you know. I still have it at the house. It's quite a hat.

M: When did this happen?

C: Oh, this would have to be somewhere around the fall of '77.

M: Leonel, I'd like to start out this part of the interview with the matter of the Carter Plan for undocumented workers. Could you trace the evolution how that plan came about, and your direct role in formulating the plan?

C: Somewhere in April of '77 the Department of Justice, in conjunction with the Department of Labor and the White House and the Department of State, as a result of a White House directive had a Task Force on Immigration whose duty it was to formulate a new immigration policy. This group had been working for some time, several months actually, before I came on board in May of '77. And the group, predictably, had been met with strong positions and had been met with skepticism among the old-timers who felt that it was almost impossible, and also by some great optimism on the part of the Carter people that they could resolve this problem like they were gonna resolve a lot of others.

When I got there the plan had been pretty well...much of it had already been designed, and I only sat in on a few meetings towards the end of it. Several concepts were easily established, and there were no questions about it. One was the notion that we should legalize many of the people who have been here for some time with no papers. This unfortunately became known as amnesty. But there was general agreement among all the parties involved that this had to happen. And everybody agreed. Someone /suggested/ it should be up to three years of the date of enactment of the legislation, some went further back and said seven years prior to the date of legislation, some a little bit further back. But that was the range, three to seven years. There was no strong disagreement there at all. Everyone agreed.

M: Who was on this Task Force?

C: The President had someone from Stu Eisenstat's office. In effect, technically, it was all the Cabinet members that I mentioned, but obviously someone else represented them. And so that would mean that Califano, Secretary of HEW, then, the Attorney General, Griffin Bell, Secretary of Labor, Ray Marshall, and Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, all theoretically were represented, as was the White House. And there were some others who came in and out. And they all had, of course, representatives who were there. There were one or two Cabinet-level meetings on this issue. And then of course they were all sounding their views with the members of Congress.

The group agreed on legalization; the group generally agreed, despite strong pressures against the idea, on an employer sanctions program; and agreed on more liberalized immigration processing, streamlining, of immigration service in the future. But there were some big hang-ups about what to do with those people who didn't qualify for amnesty because they'd been here too short a time and who wouldn't benefit at all. And the resolution, the final plan, came about as a result of Griffin Bell, the Attorney General, one day deciding on the way to a meeting at the White House, that he thought the best way to do it would be to create a new status called Temporary Resident Alien.

M: That was Bell's idea?

C: Yeah. And the idea was then to give a group of people in effect a form of temporary worker status without giving them social service benefits. Bell's thinking was that they never asked for the benefits anyway, so you're really not taking away something that they haven't got to begin with. There were

others in the group who argued that that would cause a great big civil rights battle with people saying that /these aliens would be second-class citizens and so on. But Bell and his idea prevailed. And then there were some other little twists in it, but these were the major elements.

The plan also called for a major beefing-up of the enforcement, of adding two thousand Border Patrol officers. At that time that meant almost doubling the size of the Border Patrol. As a result of budget cuts and budget balances and whatnot, no Border Patrol officers really were added in all the time I was there. Well, maybe we added another 25 or 30 total, in two and a half years.

And the plan itself drew attacks from both the left and the right--that is, those who thought it was too liberal and those who thought it was too harsh. And it didn't get much support in the Senate, so it never even got to a hearing /in the House and had perfunctory hearings in the Senate, where very few people even showed up. Members of the Senate themselves didn't show up.

M: Did you sit in on any of the meetings on this plan?

C: I sat in on the last ones, the last meetings that were held to develop this plan. It was already pretty well developed at that point. I sat in and took part in some of the conversations. I was pushing hard at that time for just streamlining the service and trying to get administrative support. I thought they were being too ambitious trying to get this huge plan in. And it appeared to me the service could never manage, could never run such a huge program, even if it were funded.

I think I've mentioned to you what happened at the one Cabinet-level meeting that I attended on the subject where the President was present.

Somewhere in summer of '77--probably about June, I would guess--the President convened a meeting of most of his Cabinet members. And he called in Bert Lance, who was then head of OMB; Califano and Griffin Bell; Ray Marshall; I don't know if Cy Vance was there, someone was there for the Secretary of State; Eisenstat--a whole number of very high level people. Bob Strauss even came in on that one. And the President convened the meeting and gave the group about 40 minutes to discuss the key elements of a new immigration policy and the plan. They went all around the table. After they'd completed their discussion on what should be done, with somebody arguing for a national ID card and somebody against it and so on, the President asked me what I thought about it. He said, "You'd have to implement it." And I said, "Well, Mr. President, I think this is all well and good, and I hate to disagree with my boss." Griffin Bell had just spoken on something, and he was my boss at the Department of Justice. The President answered, "Well, Leonel, I want you to know you got more than one boss." And I said, "Yes, sir." So I said, "Well, my view is that what we really need at the Immigration Service more than all of these things, most of which are very critical issues, is typewriters. They need to have the capacity to process what we've got. There's no way we could handle another million people, handle an amnesty program and all these other things. We aren't able to answer our mail." And he was very impressed with that and ordered some other folks to help us with the administrative stuff and get us some support and all. But it never happened. Some of it did happen, but not enough. He was very interested in the fact that I was looking at administrative issues, and that a lot of the other issues were just pie in the sky.

M: Do you recall any memorable statements that anyone made in that meeting,

advocating one position or another?

C: Well, in response to questions about the need for a universal ID card, Judge Bell said that he thought that would be nothing less than apartheid and that he would never support such a program. He had seen how it worked in South Africa to separate the blacks and the whites; he knew it could be too easily misused, based on his experience as a federal judge. And he just never would go for it. Califano was asked about it, about the universal ID card, and he said it would cost a half a billion dollars for him to upgrade the Social Security card to that point. There were some concerns expressed by Ray Marshall about the need for an employer sanctions /program/, and the President was generally supportive of that idea. There were also come concers about the amnesty, and no one had any trouble with that. Bob Strauss I think was there to review the general political effectiveness of such a program and it's political viability.

The President...it was kind of fascinating. The President got there and he said, "I thank everybody for coming. I'm glad you're all here. I want you all to speak freely, honestly, and openly, and we've got 40 minutes to look at this problem." Which actually, I guess, in presidential terms, is a lot of time for one issue. But I thought it was fascinating; the whole thing was to happen in 40 minutes.

M: Was this the first time that you met with high-powered people in these positions?

C: It was my first time in a Cabinet-level session, yeah. I'd been at the Cabinet Room before for meetings of various types. I'd been in the White House on a number of occasions. And I'd even been in that same room, in that same meeting room, for other occasions. Not a whole lot, but a few

others. But it was the first time that I'd ever been with a Cabinet-level group and with the President.

M: Now, what happened to the plan? It didn't get anywhere.

C: The plan was introduced and it didn't go very far, but it did serve the purpose of testing the water. That is, it indicated just how tough it was gonna be and it also gave us a clear view as to which ideas would sell and which ones wouldn't. It also, I thought, interestingly enough, gave us a good picture who the allies were and who they weren't. Because the plan was a compromise between the many factions on the issue. And the President, I think, mistakenly--now, in hindsight--tried to compromise with all the warring factions, those that wanted much more amnesty and those that wanted much less, for example. So he took midpoints on many of these issues. And I feel like he'd have been much better advised to have taken a position and then presented that position as the moral imperative; not as the reasonable plan, but one that was a little more to the left or a little more to the right, or more liberal or more restrictive. And that I think would have had at least some strong allies. But because it was a middle position, it didn't give him a whole lot of strong allies. It clicked perhaps in the general public; and this is a continuous Jimmy Carter problem, in that he often takes middle positions or simpler positions which don't make him popular with any of the opposing interest groups, but probably will sell to the American public. But the interest groups will be very unhappy, whoever it is that he's talking about at the time.

In immigration, taking a middle position angers everybody and pleases no one. If you take the position of, let's say, Temporary Worker Program,

you'll get a lot of strong allies. You'll get the agricultural movement; some of it, agribusiness outfits and all. At least you'll have some strong allies. Or if you take the other route, you'll have strong allies. But if you take the middle part on the Resident Temporary Worker or Resident Temporary Immigrant concept, you only make a lot of strong enemies on both sides.

M: What kind of plan would you like to have seen? What was your own position on the issue?

C: Well, I thought we were developing a compromise plan. And I felt that despite some of the obvious weaknesses within the Carter proposal, something like a Temporary Resident Alien Program, which I would have called the Guest Worker Program and made it straight outright what it was, would have sold. That plus a generous legalization or amnesty. I think that would have sold. But the President was much more accommodating, wanted to do much more, wanted a program that was much more acceptable to the AFL-CIO and some of the other interest groups. I think that's how we ended up with that one plan that didn't fly. I also liked the idea of much more emphasis on the administrative side of INS, as I indicated.

M: You were charged, then, with selling this plan. Do you recall any situations that came up as you tried to defend it?

C: Well, the problem was that the President and the administration were selling it, everybody was selling it, in a lukewarm fashion or in a reasonable fashion, which is a very bad way to present a plan. Because the way things work in Washington, you're either all for it or you're dead. You've got to push very hard as an advocate. So if you're trying

to present a reasonable plan, you're in trouble. And of course everybody had to find a focal point for kicking the plan. So obviously I was the focal point of a number of demonstrators or the protestors who would go to various places where I would be or where there'd be a conference on the issue, something of that sort.

M: You recall any particular incidents that happened at any of these meetings over that?

C: At one point we used to joke that the only government official that got picketed more than me was Jimmy Carter. So, you know, it was sort of expected that I would have the demonstrators either...somewhere. Sometimes they'd even come inside the hall to demonstrate while I was speaking, sometimes they'd stay outside. I just knew it was nothing new. There was so many of those that I just didn't bother lots of times. Every now and then I'd go out and talk to the demonstrators.

In one case I even invited them up on the podium. The group called COSSMHO, the Council of Spanish Speaking Mental Health Organizations. They were meeting in Houston, their annual convention. They invited me to be a speaker the night of their final event. While I was speaking, some of them were demonstrating outside, and some came inside and demonstrated, and some walked out while I was speaking and some called me names while they were walking out, and a few of them started chanting while I was talking. So what I did, so as to avoid any problems for the people in charge of the event--that is, that they wouldn't call the police or something--from the podium I invited the group that was against me to have 15 minutes of my time, and I'd just be limited to 20 minutes and I would even answer their questions. And so I did, and turned into a pretty

exciting after dinner speaker.

Some of the other groups, I thought, were pretty shabby in their approach--you know yelling, wanting to speak, and trying to put up all sorts of signs and things. One case in Laredo, I was there for a LULAC conference and the protestors had up signs in which they accused me of being a murderer, because a pregnant woman had died, and of course the baby had died, as a result of problems she'd had at a border crossing point in Progreso, Texas. And the irony of the whole thing was that the person who had inspected her had been a Customs Inspector, and not INS. But still they sued me and they raised a big stink. The Chicano group carried all kind of signs calling me a baby killer and an assassin, and all sorts of things.

M: How did that happen, that incident?

C: Well, it's still under litigation even now, so I'm not able to go into a whole lot of detail except to say that the woman was crossing, and under one version she was bringing over a maid who was undocumented. Under her version, it was a mistake. The inspector asked for papers. The woman went inside and waited. According to the story given by the woman's family, the inspector was extra rough on her, and they're alleging that the questioning was so rough that she got very nervous, and that led to the problems. The inspector was trained as a paramedic and did try to provide first aid, and they did call an ambulance and so on. But Progreso is a little out of the way. By the time the ambulance came, it was too late.

M: She had a miscarriage?

C: Well, she died, and the infant died as well, the not yet born infant.

M: When did that happen?

C: I'd have to check the calendars to give you an exact date. It was probably the summer of '78, the summer of '78.

M: You were saying that you were being called a murderer at this particular meeting in Laredo.

C: At that particular one, yeah. Well, that was the result of that particular incident. Then there were some people that made their point in making wild statements and issuing news releases to the press. I thought, some cases very irresponsible news releases (and some cases they were important things that had to be said) about the Border Patrol being this or being a bunch of killers or something like that. So I was often on the defensive explaining that, trying to explain. And people of course, were demanding more representation of blacks and Chicanos and women as well. It was a...it was a pretty exciting time.

M: When you spoke in places like LA and San Diego where there are some pretty militant Chicano groups, did you encounter any incidents that stand out?

C: Well you know, I take all of that demonstrating and all with a grain of salt. That is, I've been a demonstrator myself and I try to separate myself from the fact that they're demonstrating against a particular policy or a particular program or a particular position rather than me personally. And I guess the one situation that was most interesting was in the National Association of Social Work Conference, probably be November or so, '77, something like that. I'd have to check again for dates. I was to speak at their conference in San Diego. And while I was speaking, the group outside was demonstrating, Chicanos for something

Reform, CCR. And they were demonstrating outside and stamping on the windows and making a lot of noise while I was trying to speak. Then they got in the hotel where I was speaking, chanting in the hallway, so you could hear it right through the halls as we were all sitting there listening. Then right as I was there, one of them just stormed in with a lot of petitions and demanded that I take them, you know, and stormed out. Then they made a lot of noise while I was talking. Afterwards, one of the participants came up to me to offer me his help. I didn't know who he was, so I said, "Well, thank you." And he was a crew cut guy, young guy. Turned out he was the head of the Ku Klux Klan for the state, and he was in the meeting as well, as well as the social workers and Chicano activists. So there were a number of pretty exciting things like that.

M: When did you find out he was a member of the Ku Klux Klan?

C: Well, after he shook my hand, he gave me his card and said what he was.

M: Did you say anything else to him?

C: I told him I didn't want his help.

M: What did he say?

C: Then there was a swirl of movement and I was out of there.

M: You told me once that you felt like you were in danger physically, that sometimes you felt that way.

C: Well, on some occasions I had body guards. On my later trips to San Diego I almost always had body guards and I even had them going out of the plane onto the...I would go out the back door of the plane, if you will. I would not go through one of the terminals, I'd get off the plane and then go into a waiting police car, Border Patrol car, and go to a hotel or somewhere, and not usually through the terminal. It wasn't

because of my importance, it was because they were worried about security. They'd had threats and things. I had, you know, a number of threats. You just sort of looked at those.

M: Can you tell me about those threats?

C: Well, you can't get much. You know, people call up and say they're gonna get you or call somebody else and say they're gonna get you, kill you, or something. Some of my staff would get nervous.

M: Did you have any direct threats? Not over the phone, just person to person? Well, I had a few people who said that they really didn't like what I was going to do or something, but nobody ever said he was going to beat me up. Most of the people were very tough in their speechmaking. They would make big speeches about how horrible I was or something. On a face to face encounter, usually they'd back off. Usually they'd be very different in face to face than they would at public meetings.

M: These body guards that you had, were they INS employees?

C: Yeah, almost always, although some governments offered help as well.

M: Does INS have body guards available, or are these security people in the agency?

C: Well, actually, we have our own Border Patrol and our own police. The city would just assign somebody to be my security. They're not body guards in the traditional sense, they're security.

M: Pretty big guys?

C: No, no, just average security guys. And in one instance we had security people outside my hotel room all night because of some security questions. It was in Arizona. I had two or three guys outside the hotel room and in the parking lot, other places. When I went to Santo Domingo, there was

a guy right outside the door with a machine gun the whole time. And when I was in Cambodia, of course, that was normal there. We went to the border of Thailand, Cambodia. You could hear the shelling in the distance, and everybody had machine guns. They even gave me one, as we'd go up to the refugee camp. That place was later bombed, where I was.

So you learned to be careful. I didn't go out drinking on these trips late at night by myself or anything like that. You have to be extra careful. Some of my assistants were also very careful in that they would protect me not so much from so much physical harm or didn't want to protect me from that so much as they did from just general intrusion. See, the Commissioner of Immigration has an enormous amount of power, some perceived and some real. And if I'm in New York City, you know, I might get a call at two a.m., five a.m., somebody wants to see me 'cause their wife's about to be deported or their nephew's about to be deported or their son is being deported, something; can I help them. Or they haven't seen their spouse in eight years, what can I do? And so you'd have notes under your hotel room door. One instance I remember, I landed in LA Airport and there was a woman asking me to prevent the deportation of her son who was being deported on drug charges and other things, but who had grown up in this country, had never really lived abroad, the young man. And she was wondering what I could do on the case. I don't know how she ever found out I was going to be landing in Los Angeles. It got to where I couldn't even go to certain places without people stopping me and asking for some benefit or some help, or wanting to tell me their story. So some of my aides would sometimes check us into a hotel under their name. And all the phone calls would go to their room, not to mine. That way I'd get a little

sleep.

Also, the press in some instances was merciless. And I had a fellow call me once, I think it was in San Diego. It must have been one, two a.m., a talk show. And I was asleep. The guy called up and informs me that I'm live on radio and that it's a talk show and people will have some questions for me. He heard I was in town, found out where I was staying, hopes that I don't mind the intrusion. And there I am, you know-- sound asleep on radio.

M: And you answered the phone yourself?

C: Yeah. That's why some of the aides thought it would be better to have the phone ring in their room rather than in my room. And people call you up, they want to take you out and show you a good time as well. They're well meaning persons, no evil intent at all, most of those. The press was just eager to get the news.

/PAUSE/

M: You mentioned that you went to the border between Thailand and Cambodia. How did that happen?

C: I went as a result again of my work. I was in charge of the refugee processing. So I had staff throughout Southeast Asia, and I was invited to go see what was going on, and to see what the need would be and was. So I went. And I went with a Department of State person and visited the camps. I went to several places in Thailand, to Non Kai near where the Mekong River is, visited several camps there; Bangkok, the transition center; then a place called Areanea Potek which is where the Cambodians were. Then I went to some other camps as well in Malaysia and some other places. But, still, it was part of my work and I wanted to see what was

going on. I wanted to visit the camps myself. And it was a tremendous experience. I don't recommend it to anybody. I wish that we didn't have to go to camps, but it was a tremendously enlightening experience. And I do hope to get back over there as a private citizen to see for myself again, because I think there's nothing quite as good as visiting the camps. Being in other places in the world is tremendously helpful when you discuss policy.

M: Was it as bad as we'd seen it on tv lately?

C: Yeah, I think so. I think the camps were so bad and the situation was so horrible that we can't help but wonder anew at man's inhumanity to man. The situations are just unbelievably bad. And yet, in an odd way, for all of the horror and all of the problem, there was also a great deal of hope within these camps. That is, you did see within these camps an enormous amount of talent. And you did see people who were setting up classes and preparing and doing artwork and setting up chapels or churches or shrines, or getting themselves ready for something in the future. There were some really talented people. These were the survivors. The Vietnamese in camp especially were amazing that they had a lot of M.D.'s there. They had some really talented people register in a temporary situation as a refugee. And I'm sure those that have come here...I know those that have done very, very well for themselves.

M: When did you go?

C: November '78, I think that was.

M: And how long were you there?

C: I was gone about 10 days on that particular trip.

M: Did you see people starving? Little kids?

- C: No, not in the camps. No. In the camps, people did have enough to eat. They were leaving situations where there was starvation, and they told you about it. You know, you'd talk to them and they'd tell you about it. But within the camp there was not starvation. Within the camp there was depravation and desperation, and people waiting, not enough medical care, and inadequate health facilities, overcrowding and so on. But there was not starvation.
- M: Do you recall in your own mind making a comparison between that situation there, these people being in such a desperate state and being victims of war, with the situation that you've faced along the U.S.-Mexico border, with many people also desperate, but victims in another sense?
- C: Well, some people did constantly raise the issue of, well if you give aid to the Vietnamese, why can't you give aid to the Mexicans? Or, isn't the border another Viet Nam? Matter of fact, a friend of mine wrote a book in which that was her primary analogy, that the U.S.-Mexico border was another Viet Nam. I think those are overdrawn analogies. Along the border there is, tragically, some life and death drama there. I mean by that there are some people dying on a far too frequent basis. And along the U.S.-Mexican border, there are some horrible situations where people are trapped or pressed by misery and poverty, lack of opportunity and so on. But the scale of the tragedy of Cambodia and of Viet Nam and Southeast Asia just so totally overwhelms the tragedy along the southern border, that it's not even right to compare 'em.

In Cambodia, we're talking about a country where possibly one-fourth of the entire population was killed in a period of two years. and we're talking about a country that had been at war for 30 years. And we're

talking about a person being shot at regularly as they try to cross the Meking River as they try to get into the camp at Aranea Potek. And you can see the soldiers being brought in, you can hear the artillery shells. And you can see the military, follow the military preparations and so on. And there's not any question about what's going on. Whereas along the U.S.-Mexican border, for all of our tremendous and proper protesting, we really don't have anything like that. We do have sensors, but I don't know of anybody that's been mined along the U.S.-Mexican border. We do have some armed troops, but I don't know anybody using a machine gun to go after undocumented aliens. And there's just no comparison, none at all. And in even our facilities, for all of our complaining about them, the inadequacy of our facilities, they are infinitely superior to what you see over there.

Plus the opportunity that someone coming from Cambodia or Viet Nam is looking for is so vague and so distant as opposed to the opportunity that someone coming from Mexico is seeking. Coming from Cambodia, survival is a major goal. And coming from Mexico, improvement, advancement, is the major goal. So it's really very, very hard to compare.

M: What was the result of that trip?

C: I was able to make much more effective a presentation of our position, more meaningful. I had a more meaningful impact. I think it also affected me. I think my life will always include something of that part of Southeast Asia. I think another practical effect was that I set up an immigration office in Bangkok--that was announced by the Vice-President in a speech that he made when he later went to Southeast Asia--and I set up a system for rotating and processing people through those camps. It

greatly accelerated the flow, and it gradually and generally improved the presence and administration of the Immigration Service in that part of the world. So there were some practical benefits in the long term on me and a few other people who traveled with me, deep personal benefits.

M: During your time as Commissioner, were boat people coming in?

C: Yes. Yes, there were boat people. I visited one of those camps also and got to see the boats that they come in on, and an island where they were. I think it was Palau Trenganya. I saw the little ships they'd come on. I even got into the ships. And I also saw the facilities in which they lived. And I talked with the Malaysian government and visited with them about their views on boat people, and interviewed a number of boat people myself, walked through their camp. I went out there in a launch. A boat was the only way to get out there. They wanted them off the main island of Malaysia.

M: What do you recall seeing and feeling at that time?

C: Well, now, I'd been four years in /the/ Philippines in Peace Corps, so Malaysia is very similar. Language is similar, obviously, but not the same. But I was able to grasp a little bit more in Malaysia than I was in Thailand. It's just this mass of people on this little bitty island, and it was organized. I mean, they had their stuff together. There were people in little sections and everything was divided. They made their own latrines and their own everything. Their problem was, /it was/ very, very crowded. I was impressed with the fact that they were already setting up their own little economy. They had a hospital, first aid center. They had no equipment but they had a lot of M.D.'s that could help. They built a church (some of them were Christians), out of primarily the wreckage of

the ships that they'd come in on. And this church had been built even against the orders of the Malaysian government. They didn't want any permanent facilities there. But they had built it anyway. And that was impressive. One guy sold me an apple, even though that was also against the law. But they had their own little stores. Local police didn't want them running businesses. There's a real problem in Malaysia about ethnic balance--so many Chinese, so many Malaysians, so many Indians. The balance is very carefully preserved, and they didn't want stores. But one guy sold me an apple and they later told him he shouldn't sell me anything. I bought an apple on the main island. I knew just what the monetary units were, really. But I said, "Yeah, I'd like an apple." They sold a lot of those little candies and things. And the kids were all over the place.

The processing center was just a steam room, big nipa. You know, nipas are like palm fronds--big, big barn-type affair. People were coming in. It's all sand, there are no floors. And all the stuff was done outdoors. There's our immigration processors filling papers, asking questions. All international relief agencies were there doing their work. And they were running their own kitchen and having classes in English, almost all outdoors or in facilities that had no floors. And in very small rooms, which you'd consider a small-bedroom in the United States, you'd have a family. That would be the quarters for a whole family. And that was not as crowded as the camps in Thailand.

I think it was fascinating that we here kept talking about how the Thais should be generous, and let more people come in, and the Malays should be generous, and yet here we got very upset when 100,000 Cubans came. And we're a country of 220 million and much more land. And there

they were with more than 100,000 people who were coming from a war zone, which is a lot different from what we got. And it's amazing how upset we were over these [Cubans]. That was a fascinating trip.

M: Let me come back to the times that you were being attacked and picketed and so on. What were your feelings about being a former demonstrator yourself, in your own words, on civil rights issues and fighting for Chicano rights, to be the target of attack on the part of your own people?

C: Well, on some of them I felt that if they weren't attacking, they wouldn't be doing their job. That is, you have to go after the particular area that's in question. Unfortunately, I thought some of them were being unfair or shortsighted and that they were attacking the wrong person. For instance, I thought they were making a great big mistake in going after me, when the real ability to bring people over, or some of the real obstacles and the people who were pushing the aspects of the law that they didn't like were other people. But most people will lash out at what's nearest to them, and I was closer to them than let's say Ray Marshall or someone else. And I don't know why they never went after these other people, but they clearly did not. And as a result, you just have to take it. You try to get very philosophical about it and don't let it get under your skin, 'cause then it just takes up too much emotional energy and too much time. And you just assume that that's just part of the way it works. I tried not to get too upset about it.

M: Were you called Tfo Taco or a sell-out or a taitor to la raza? Things of that sort.

C: I was called everything. I was called every imaginable name.

M: Did those terms bother you?

C: Not too much. I don't really take much of that too... I shouldn't make it sound like I'm a person that believes totally in the "sticks and stones may break my bones" theory, but you try to distance yourself emotionally as best you can. It only bothers you when persons that you've known a long time and respected a great deal gave in to the urge for a simplistic view and joined in on that. That's the only time it really bothered me. Other than that, it didn't. I mean, I even enjoyed arguing with some of the demonstrators.

I had one incident at the University of Texas where I went to speak, and this group of students attacked me and demanded that I support the plan of José Angel Gutiérrez. And I did something I shouldn't have done; but I engaged the students in a debate, because they were obviously there under the urging of their professor, who was an activist. And I asked them what they were for. And some of them got in an argument among themselves as to what they were for. But their view was of amnesty and so on. They ended up storming out accusing me of trying to trick 'em. But I shouldn't have done that. I try not to pick on the students, because, you know, it's not good. Although in some instances they were just really rude and really bad. But in most instances they were not. There were groups everywhere that, you know, act that way.

To me the interesting thing was that one of the goals was to tone down the level of emotional fervor in the debate, and I think I did do that. When I started the job, within a week I was in Los Angeles in my first news conference there. There must have been 150, 200 news people. The room was just jammed with press people. I had a long table for a conference, and the whole table was all microphones. And toward the end

of my tour, when I'd go to Los Angeles there'd be very little press. The issue had really toned down. And the questions were no longer as much about the silent invasion as they had been. Up to then it was all silent invasion, silent invasion, and the brown hordes and so on. And a lot of that I was able to tone down a good bit. But at first that was not the case. That was difficult at first, 'cause everybody was just so upset. My predecessor had managed to get everybody up to a fever pitch about the silent invasion.

M: Let me ask you about another big issue during your time as Commissioner. This is about the Tortilla Curtain. Could you trace the evolution of that problem?

C: As best I remember it, the matter had gone through several Congressional reviews. The Congress had debated the subject a year even or two before I'd gotten there, decided it should be in the budget. It was a question of replacing and then extending existing fence along the border. The proposal was for about 25 miles of fence, and it was a few million dollars of expenditures. No objections had been raised anywhere in the hearings. Nobody even paid attention to it. They were all public meetings and I don't think the matter even was questioned. It was just routinely passed as another capital expenditure.

For some reason, as we got toward the actual construction phase, the matter suddenly became an obvious highly symbolic issue, and several Chicano groups called press conferences at different places in the country to protest the fence. And the press interviewed a contractor out of Houston who made a very dumb comment about how it was being constructed in such a way that it would be sharp enough to cut off the toes of anyone

that tried to climb it. It was a very dumb comment, but it caused an enormous uproar. It even got the president of Mexico to make a comment on it from China. We quickly took many rough features off of it.

M: It did have those features though?

C: It did have some sharp edges. But what I think would have happened is that over a short period of time, being exposed to the elements, a lot of these sharp, unfinished /edges of/ steel would have become much smoother. Anyway, we had it dipped in the liquid to make it more blunt and not nearly likely to injure anyone trying to climb it. And then the issue receded gradually. The fences had been built. They serve as one more obstacle, but they're hardly anything like a military obstacle. People just walk around 'em. Some of them even have holes in them over there. I consider that to be primarily a symbolic issue. It had almost no substantive merit--the issue itself or the fence. To me it was just almost 99 per cent symbolic. And I was always amazed at how hot everybody got about the fence, because they obviously didn't know that we always had a fence. And the majority of the fences that we'd seen were much more dangerous. We had fences for years along San Diego that /had/ barbed wire rolls on top of them. During World War II they had these towers where people could look down over the fence for miles along the border.

M: Those were taken down though because the Mexicans objected to them.

C: Yeah, 'cause of the tower concept. And this was nowhere near that militaristic. And it was primarily in the urban areas. Decansini, _____ the senator from Arizona, liked the fence idea so much in the hearings and after they were announced, that he

insisted on a fence for Arizona, and got it in the budget.

M: But they had had fences in Arizona for some time before that.

C: Not in the area where he wanted it.

M: Where was that?

C: I think he wanted it in Yuma, or an area where there were some problems with petty thievery and so on. They also wanted some work done on some canals so that there would be no ladders on the U.S. side, no steps.

All the steps on the canal would be on the Mexican side so they couldn't come up the sides either. All of those ideas were simply short term.

The policy became in my mind, the only way to deal with that issue.

M: What problems did this cause for you personally?

C: The fence?

M: Yeah.

C: Well, again, you have to explain what it's about, what the real history of it is, what it really will do. And you have to deal with the horrible press, you have to deal with the ugly symbolism that was being used. And you had to deal with the obvious easy target that the fence makes. But I guess the major problem was that it was so easy for folks to discuss a fence and to get really hot about a fence, which in the long run really wouldn't amount to much in terms of enforcement or presenting a major obstacle to crossing, and really didn't amount to much in terms of policy. The fence is not the equivalent of the helicopter. No one raised a big protest about the helicopters, although there were some in San Diego, especially. I think it just indicates that in discussing immigration policy, you have to get involved in symbols and you have to pick your symbol, and that's the issue on which you wage the war, if you will. And what it meant to me

personally was that I was going to have to spend a lot more time on an issue that really, when it was all finally settled, whether it was built or not, would have very little impact.

But it did indicate, kind of interestingly enough, that if you take a long-range view, how far we had come from the notion of the silent invasion and the brown hordes to the view that a fence 12 miles long was a major affront and a major weapon. Whereas General Chapman had been asking for 90 million dollars or 100 million dollars of beefing-up the enforcement on it. And then we got from that aspect all the way down to a fence would be too much. So I think it indicated, in a long-range perspective, that we were making some progress. But in short term it meant much more dealing with what I would call issues of symbolism and not of substance.

M: Any particular incidents or meetings that you had with people or groups in the United States or in Mexico about this particular issue?

C: About the fence?

M: Yes.

C: Well, there was lots of press and there were a lot of questions. We developed some positions, and different people wanted to ask about the fence and made statements about it. But there was not really a whole lot that was done internally. We developed a position, we tried to present it, we modified the fence contract, changed the design, and that was it. There was not really a whole lot to do administratively. The war was more one of press and media and symbols and much less one of anybody to get deeply involved in anything substantive. The White House said they didn't want a fence except where we already had one, so that limited the decision. But really, you know, there was really not much. On a 2,000-mile border, if you have 25 or 12 7miles

of fence⁷, it doesn't make a whole lot of difference.

M: Let me ask you about the Ku Klux Klan. They got involved there for a while in trying to help the Border Patrol keep Mexicans out of the country. At least that's what they said they would do. Did you get involved in that situation directly?

C: Well, the Ku Klux Klan is an even better case of symbolism assuming more importance than substance. As best I could tell, the Ku Klux Klan never had more than 12 people on the border at more than one time. They did have news conferences at all different places. Sometimes they'd get on a plane apparently and have a news conference at one place and another place and another place. And the groups that protested against them always completely outnumbered them, and the press outnumbered everybody.

And the Ku Klux Klan visited our facility in San Diego, the border crossing point there, and walked in--it's a public place--and looked at the facility. The groups in San Diego raised cane. The Chicano groups there raised all kind of cane, saying that that was all kind of violations. And yet you can't close the facility to anybody. They walked in and then they held a news conference and said how they were gonna help us. We of course said we didn't want their help and they'd arrest them if they did anything. They kept holding news conferences all up and down the border. Different Chicano groups then said they were gonna arm and go after 'em. Rumors spread that the Mexican police were going to the border to deal with the Ku Klux Klan. And when it all was over, we spent hundreds of hours dealing with the press going down there looking for the Klan and almost no time with their actual work.

As best we can tell, all they ever did was they arrested one...they,

the Klan, one carload of Klansman, picked up one Mexican who was near San Clemente. They grabbed his green card and threw it away and brought him into the Border Patrol. The Border Patrol questioned him, found out he was here legally, they had thrown away a good mica. They went back got the good mica where he said they'd thrown it away, found it. Turned out he was here legally. Then we prosecuted the Klansmen and found them guilty of false arrest. And that was the only case in which they actually did something. Almost all they ever did was hold news conferences. It's fascinating how quickly the American press covered that, and again how much enormous, enormous damage they did to U.S.-Mexican relations, 'cause it was front page all over Mexico City /for/ weeks.

M: Well, did you get together with the Mexicans or call them?

C: Yeah, we told them what we saw happening and there wasn't that much to it, and that there were no arrests. But the Klan kept making statements, and the Mexican press kept buying them and the U.S. press kept buying them. So no one would believe us. It was just amazing.

M: I came across a reference in a newspaper article that at that time you had a meeting with Bell and MALDEF to discuss this issue.

C: No. MALDEF was in Washington, in and out of Washington, and we did have a meeting there on lots of issues. MALDEF was there on a number of issues, and I think that's one of those that came up. It was only one of many, many issues.

M: Nothing outstanding or memorable?

C: Not solely on that one issue.

M: You were talking about the Klan.

C: I was gonna say that the Klan is important because it's a perfect illustration of how these groups can use media so effectively and cause problems everywhere. The Mexican press and the U.S. press gave an enormous amount of space to statements of the Klan. The Mexican press ran front page stories quite a while on statements by Klan leaders. They included pictures of lynchings that had taken place in the 1920s and histories of the horrible Klan and its role in segregation, and replayed all of this as if it had happened in the last week on the Mexican border--when in fact it just wasn't so. The U.S. press obliged by then reporting on what the Mexican press said. And the relationships were such that I'm sure that for a while there everybody in Mexico was convinced that the Klansmen were torturing and killing Mexicans all up and down the border and were a part of the Border Patrol. Some Chicano groups in the United States demanded that we arrest the Klan or that we issue strong, strong statements saying we don't cooperate with them and that we'll have nothing to do with any Klansmen and so on. There were some unbelievable emotional reactions to it.

And while one shouldn't play down the fact that the Klan has been horrible and can be horrible, I think that in this instance the press stories were far more overreaching than were the actual activities of the Klan. They actually apprehended one Mexican. They actually never showed up on patrol, that we knew. We looked for them everywhere. We even had emergency plans all up and down the border just in case they did show up. They never showed. And they did keep everybody all up and down the border

on both sides in a dither for several weeks there.

M: In retrospect, you can look at it that way but at that time were you very nervous about this?

C: No, I was not nervous. I was concerned, but I wasn't nervous. I didn't think the Klan ever were gonna be a big threat. I thought they were mostly a lot of talk. But talk can lead to lots of problems from other groups. I was concerned about the chain reaction that the Klan could start rather than what the Klan itself would do.

M: Did you have any conversations with Carter or Bell about this?

C: Well, Bell was in on a few things that he wanted to know and his aides wanted to know. Carter himself, as far as I know, never got into it.

M: Leonel, did you ever brief President Carter about the immigration issue in his meetings with Lopez Portillo?

C: No. I worked on a number of documents that were for either presidential review or vice-presidential review on different occasions, not only prior to the meetings with the President of Mexico but also prior to the meetings that the Vice-President had with the President of Mexico, Vice-President Mondale. And I also had a relatively long conversation with Rosalyn Carter during her trip to Rome for the funeral of the Pope. You see, the way you prepare for a presidential visit, a visit between two presidents, is that there're a whole lot of people working on the briefing book, and a lot of material is discussed for inclusion in that book. The National Security Council, the Department of State and many, many sections or departments of the government are all putting material in that book and you have to condense all of that material into something halfway readable, otherwise it'll be too big a book. And I worked on that project, but it

was with a lot of other people.

M: Do you think what you said or suggested in there was taken seriously?

C: Oh, yeah. I think that my views gained in importance the longer I was there simply 'cause I had more friends and more allies, and the views were more acceptable. Through reputation and through a network of allies and friends, your statements gain a little more respect.

M: Could you tell me about the meetings that you had with Mexican officials in Mexico?

C: Well, they range from formal, official protocol-type meetings at all levels--both at the border official level, local mayors even--all the way up to high level officials in the Mexican government. And the meetings are probably very different in that the Mexicans, as a group, seemed to express only a few positions, if they expressed any at all. But the Mexicans were much more consistent and much more unified in presenting views of the Mexican government on immigration and other issues, whereas our view, our government, often had 50 different views going all at once. We also had a lot of different interpretations going within our government, and the Mexicans did not. The Mexican position did gradually change, and I guess you could say it evolved into one of a great deal of concern about human rights and about the undocumented and about joint activity from an initial feeling that there was more the problem of the United States government--this question of migrant workers as they view it.

M: Did you ever meet with López Portillo?

C: No. I met him on three or four occasions at least when I was one of many people who shook hands and attended a meeting of Vice-President Mondale with the Cabinet, the Mexican Cabinet, but I never had a private meeting

with López Portillo.

M: What about with the head of the Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores?

C: Oh, yeah, I've met Santiago Roel, who is the head of ...I guess you'd call it Foreign Affairs on several occasions.

/PAUSE/

M: You were talking about your meetings with Santiago Roel.

W: Well, Santiago Roel had done a great bit of work out of Austin, Texas, and was very familiar with the U.S. He also spoke excellent English and was able to understand and quickly relate to a lot of things happening here. So he was familiar with issues of Chicanos and minorities in the U.S., and border concerns and U.S. attitudes. It was kind of fascinating in that right before he left, he made a well-publicized tour of the border, in which he was going to report on the treatment of Mexican nationals in the U.S. And he'd also requested reports by the Mexican consuls in the U.S. as to problems and incidences of mistreatment of Mexican nationals in the U.S. What was amazing to me was that on at least one occasion in Laredo where there was a great deal of press and the Secretary of State was asking the Mexican nationals being detained how they'd been treated and what they felt and so on, the responses were to the effect that the problem was Mexico, that Mexico had mistreated them by not letting them have jobs at home and by, therefore forcing them to leave. And while I'm sure that the Secretary heard a lot of instances of abuse, that one incident was publicized a great deal and I think it cast a different light on the trip and findings. Although a number of Mexican officials did make trips up and down the border and did visit all over the place.

M: How did you find working with Mexican officials? There's a stereotype or

a feeling that Mexican officials are very slick and non-committal and they lead on foreign officials or diplomats. Did you find that?

C: Well, they range. They are just like us. They range from the border small-town bureaucrats, or some of them would call them burócratas, who use the old style in that it means the patronage, been drinking, whiskey, sipping very, very friendly almost unbelievably friendly, all on the basis it seems of scratch my back; to the new style that López Portillo was bringing in, the young professionals who were usually a lawyer or an agriculturalist, someone with degrees in one or another technical area who was working as a Commissioner or a head of Immigration of a certain port or head of Customs at a certain area; all the way to those in Washington and those in Mexico City who were generally very sophisticated people like the Consul General in New York City or Consul Generals in San Francisco and other places. They ususally had been around the world and spoke French and Spanish and English and were extremely well-read and were able to quickly grasp many, many things. The new breed of Mexican official is very different. I think one way to illustrate just how different and how sophisticated they were would be by recounting briefly what happened on the occasion of Vice President Mondale's meeting with López Portillo and most members of the Mexican Cabinet in Mexico City.

The Vice President was going through this meeting. And the President of Mexico [is] very time conscious--wants things to move, move, move. As the meeting was continuing, the progress was slowed somewhat by the presence of an interpreter. And so everybody would say something and then the interpreter would translate and that was taking a very long time 'cause it was not the kind of meeting place where you had a lot of earphones

and whatnot. So somewhere around the half-hour mark of the meeting, President López Portillo said that from now on the interpreter would only interpret for him and everybody would speak in English, since most of his people had studied in the U.S. anyway. And it was true.

They had no problems speaking in English because most of his Cabinet members were completely fluent in English and of course in Spanish. And I noticed the same thing was true in the office of a number of Presidential assistants in Los Pinos. They similarly had been educated at Harvard or MIT or Cambridge or somewhere in Europe, and probably had many of the same books and texts that the aides to Jimmy Carter had, and many of the same friends.

M: That's interesting. During your time as Commissioner there were several meetings between Chicano leaders and Mexican officials, and then Chicano groups on their own went down there and held news conferences and publicized the problems with immigration here. Did that have any effect on the way the agency conducted its work or on you personally?

C: Well, some of these groups, I think, did a little bit more planning before they went down. A few of them, I feel, simply went down and called news conferences that helped no one--that is, that did not help clear the air or provide any new information. Some of the groups would just go down there to express their own political view. The Mexican press usually ran whichever Chicano leader was speaking at the time as a national Chicano leader. So some folks who had no constituency in the U.S. were being portrayed in the Mexican press as national Chicano leader so and so. These were difficult to explain to Mexican government officials. For instance, someone who's head of Raza Unida or of a little socialist section or a

little socialist group in the U.S. or of a local school board might come and make a big pronouncement on immigration or something. And then I had to explain that, 'cause it was appearing in Mexican press and they'd want to know what's going on.

Most of those meetings were so poorly coordinated that they really didn't help, I don't think, either government. They sort of clouded the air, they acted very much like the Ku Klux Klan stuff. It really diverted attention. My experience was that with few exceptions, the meetings were not productive. From my point of view they just took up a lot of time and forced us to deal with a lot of negative press, much of which was unsubstantiated and which was in several cases just very irresponsible. By that I mean someone gets up and says the Border Patrol is raping women and killing Mexicans along the border. And then that's covered, that's printed all over Mexico. And then we call the individual who made the statement and say, "Give us any cases you know about and we'll prosecute, we'll investigate." Invariably the individual would not have a single specific case that could be cited. But it was passed.

Some Mexicans purposely went to Mexico just to call news conferences. We had groups sometimes along the border that would go right on the other side of the border, call a news conference to blast us or somebody, and then come right back. Of course, they never said anything in the U.S. and they would try to escape responsibility by blaming it on the Mexican press or something.

DM: Do you recall any one of these news conferences in particular or any single visit on the part of Chicano leaders down to Mexico City?

C: Well, there was a group that met on an informal basis and infrequent basis

with President López Portillo, the Mexican American Commission. I'm not too familiar with that one, although MALDEF was active in there, and so were a few other groups. That group seemed to be the most responsible. Then there were some private groups. For instance, the National Council of La Raza went down and had a meeting, issued their statement on U.S. immigration policy out of Mexico City, got lots of coverage, and unfortunately in their statement they talked again about large numbers of rapes and all. Again unsubstantiated, but which we then had to try to follow up on. The Mexican American Legal Defense Fund met in Mexico City and had their statements.

There are a number of more activist groups that made their statements. In most cases the statements were more denunciations of U.S. policy than real statements of any particular view. There were a group of labor leaders usually from unions slightly to the left that would go to Mexico and write statements. And the San Diego group was constantly in Tijuana issuing news releases. Some of the news releases got really, really vitriolic. They even accused the Border Patrol of pulling Mexican's arms out of their sockets and unleashing dogs, using dogs, for patrolling and so on. All of this was printed in Mexico, all of it. But it was all false. There were instances of abuse. These were constantly being checked on. But there no pulling someone's arm out of a socket or no dogs. The dogs which were used were used by Customs and not by Immigration, and they were used for the purposes of sniffing for drugs. But some folks just constantly threw the two together, Immigration and Customs.

M: What about this case in Arizona where a few undocumented people were mistreated by these ranchers. To what extent did your office get involved

in that?

C: Well, we initially were criticized a great deal by the activist groups who somehow felt that we had taken part of protected the ranchers in some way. That took just a little while to straighten out; but once it had been straightened out the actual case was carried by other sections of the Department of Justice and by interested and concerned community groups throughout Arizona, and really some groups from throughout the country. But we were supportive of the groups that wanted a trial and wanted to see some justice done. But we really didn't have an immigration case. What we had was a situation where some farmers, private individuals, were accused of mistreating, torturing, some Mexican nationals, but that wasn't really an immigration matter. That was a civil rights abuse matter, at least from my point of view. We were supportive of efforts to come to a conclusion to try to resolve it and prosecute the individuals. But beyond that we had very little role in it.

M: What about the case of the Mennonites?

C: Oh, the Mennonites. What happened, as I remember it, was that the Mennonites were persons who had settled in Mexico for some time and who had been misled. It was a case of blockbusting on an international level. These were persons who primarily spoke German, but who really were Mexican nationals in most cases (there were some who came from Canada as well) and who had been misled in thinking that their land would be expropriated and that they would have a great deal in West Texas. So they left Mexico under a scheme that was going to result in their having a new settlement, a new community. I believe it was not Pecos, but...

M: Seminole?

C: Seminole, that's it. Seminole. And they were going to reorganize their community. So many of them packed and left Mexico and a few left Canada, they entered through six or seven points with different types of visas, and then they all came to the U.S. And for all practical purposes they were undocumented aliens. And they got to the U.S. and lived here for some months out of status--that means as undocumented. One of our Immigration officers noticed this problem and began deportation proceedings against them. The uproar was immediate because they managed to win a great deal of press support and sympathy. They were on national news constantly--these beautiful, clear-eyed, blond kids who were studying in their own schools where the only text used was the Bible, and were, as the paper often printed, Christian, God-fearing, persons who would contribute a great deal to the country. The letters started to pour in by the hundreds. Some of the letters accused me of being anti-Christian for wanting to deport good Christians. Everyone missed the point that these were Mexicans who were here without documents just like all the other Mexicans. The obvious case was made that this was racism--that dark-skinned Mexicans, no one would complain about their being deported; but the light-skinned, everybody would complain about.

So what happened was, the pressure was so great that the members of the Congress felt compelled to do something and Senator Bentsen introduced 535 private bills. This means that each individual was the subject of a special act of the Congress. The effect of that was to prevent deportation, since you cannot deport someone who is the subject of a private bill. And to this day they're still in Seminole.

M: What kind of a private bill?

C: A private bill means that the Congress will consider giving them a special exception, waiver, to the law and that each of these would be allowed to come in, in effect, outside of immigration law, 'cause they didn't qualify under any of the provisions of the immigration law that would have enabled them to stay here legally.

M: But their status has been resolved now?

C: No. As far as I understand, they were just the subject of private bills, and the moment the Congress goes out of session or adjourns they'll be deportable again. But my guess is someone will introduce more private bills and a few of them will be adjustable--that is, their status will be adjustable. But most of them will not be able to adjust simply because, of one thing, they don't intermarry--they don't marry U.S. citizens--and therefore they're not eligible to petition through a spouse. They only marry other Mennonites. Another real possibility of course is that some of them might work for U.S. companies and they'll qualify on one of other preferences. But again, most of them only work for their own companies, so they probably won't do that either. So I expect that problem will resurface shortly.

M: So the private bill only provides for temporary legalization of their status. It's not a permanent solution.

C: It doesn't even provide legalization. It provides temporary relief from deportation only in that you may not deport someone who is the subject of a private bill. It doesn't mean that the subject of the private bill cannot be deported at some later date, it means they have a cloak of cover for a period of time.

M: Would you comment on the issue of the Cubans who were counted as part of

the Western Hemisphere quota. And because they were special refugees, they should not have been counted that way, and this affected the number of Mexican immigrants who come in.

C: Oh, yeah. The case is known as the Silva Case. Under Silva, a court battle begun in 1976, resulted in granting more numbers to Mexicans. The court held that the Immigration Service and the Department of State had erred in denying Mexicans visas, and other Western Hemisphere natives, as the result of giving these visas to Cuba when Cuba really should never have had those numbers to begin with. They should have had them /as/ refugees or under some other status. And so the court ruled that over 60,000 numbers should be granted to other Western Hemisphere natives, most of whom were Mexican.

The battle was protracted. I said it was filed in '76, and really it was only until '79 that we began to see settlement on it. The impact of the first ruling of the court was felt in '77, the summer of '77. This case will have enormous significance for quite a few years in that not only do you have the direct effect of all of the Mexicans, since this is the primary group who will have a way to get their green card; but because of the ripple effect of immigration, you'll then have their relatives and spouses and children and parents, and if they naturalize all of this will take place faster. And so I look for an average flow of 75,000 to 80,000 Mexicans /per year/.

/PAUSE/

If the law is changed, the flow will be greater, will be exceeding 100,000 a year. Silva has had enormous impact on our immigration patterns.

M: What direct involvement did you have in that particular case?

- C: Well, by the time I got into the case we were already at a point of decision by the courts. The major role I had then was to get involved a little bit in the settlement aspect. And I argued for a generous settlement--that is, for the most feasible numbers and the most expeditious processing possible. That was the nature and the extent of my involvement. The legal battle had already been fought.
- M: I'm going to ask you a series of general or miscellaneous questions. In August of 1977, after the Carter Plan had been announced and the provision of the amnesty had been made public, there were reports in the press that a quarter of a million people had piled up in Tijuana and then additional numbers along other spots along the border waiting to come across to take advantage of that provision. I was in Washington in September of '77 and went to your office, and remember that you'd talked about this. Remember that particular incident?
- C: Oh, yeah, very well. The President announced his package in early August. And despite the fact that at that point he was still talking about increasing Border Patrol by 2,000 officers--in effect doubling it-- and talking about other enforcement ideas such as anti-smuggling and all, the element that caught many people's attention was the element of amnesty. The New York Times ran the initial story, saying there were a quarter of a million people poised at the border ready to swarm across, that they had been lured there by the promises of the Carter Plan, that many, many thousands more were showing up as a result of this proposed amnesty.

Well, the story was reprinted everywhere /in/ hundreds of newspapers. We sent folks down and called San Diego immediately to see what was going on. We learned then that the San Diego press had not even carried the

story cause they couldn't verify a quarter of a million people anywhere around their community, and certainly they had very good access to Tijuana 'cause they were there, they lived there. Tijuana couldn't find 'em either. But the news source was, amazingly enough, never, with one exception that I can remember, reported that the story was never true. In fact, the New York Times printed an editorial on the great need for action right away, and the editorial itself was copied and reprinted and redone throughout the country. But no one ever knew that there was really no such army. We had a great deal of trouble toning that down, trying to get the facts out of it. But that's an example of what I mean by the hysteria and the mood that existed at the time.

M: Did you have any meetings with César Chávez?

C: Yeah, I talked with César on a number of occasions, on several occasions in Washington when he was there. We mostly talked about the need for not letting growers use the strikes as a way or a cover for bringing in undocumented Mexican nationals who would in effect become scabs. César was very concerned about that. He was also concerned about proper treatment. And /he/ later termed that his major concerns had to do with enforcement--with the need for more Border Patrol to ensure that the Immigration Service wasn't being used more on behalf of the growers or against the United Farm Workers and vice versa. He had a great, great deal of concern about that. Some of his people really gave us hell, and we even had Senate hearings on the subject. Chávez demanded we send more Border Patrol to the fields in Delano and a few other places, and we did. We sent more persons. We took people away from the border in Arizona and California and Texas and sent them to California, Central California, during the time of the strike but

we really couldn't afford the detail and we didn't keep it very long.

The hearings resulted in some very nice statements of praise from Senator Harrison Williams, and unfortunately they resulted in some bad blood between us and the farm workers, and we'd been working very hard to try to build a better relationship. We'd even conducted a class for immigration counseling at the Farm Workers Center at La Paz where Chávez stays, where we'd help train some of his counselors in immigration counseling.

M: You say bad blood developed. Why?

C: Well, some of his press people and others were very unhappy. They insisted that we do more and thought that we were on the side of the growers.

M: You mentioned that Chávez initially expressed concern for the treatment of workers and that the undocumented people would not be used to break strikes, and then you said that later he emphasized enforcement. Was that an evolution on his part?

C: No. At the time it was hard to explain or to understand, but it's really quite clear now. Chávez was simply speaking to the particular interest of the union. And the particular interest of the union is the union. So he had to defend the interest of the union, he had to preserve his union--that's what he's been working on for all these years. And whatever he had to do to keep that union alive is what was the most important thing to them. Some of his lieutenants had a very stormy meeting with one of my aides, Arnold Flores, in which some of his lieutenants went so far as to ask that they be deputized so that they could help the Border Patrol chase the Mexicans and others out of the fields, the worksites. Some of them even expressed support of the Tortilla Curtain concept. And a few of them were talking once again about setting up what are called wetlines. In the

early '70s the UFW had set up wetlines, which in effect /were/ Farm Worker members who carried their own billy clubs and act as sort of Border Patrolmen, and they made sure that nobody gets in the fields. They had done this in the past themselves.

M: That I didn't know.

C: Yeah. There were a number of members of the Border Patrol who I respect a great deal who remembered it, and who it turns out, were telling the truth. The United Farm Workers Union unfortunately is much misunderstood. They're an effective union who protect the interest of their members, and they do a very good job of that. What confuses everybody is that hey began and have been depicted as a cause, as the Chicano cause, for example. And they were at one time; Chávez was the embodiment of the entire movement of Mexican Americans. Over the years Chávez and the UFW are less the best embodiment, symbol, of the total Chicano effort as they are the symbol of and the reality of a struggling union trying to win recognition and improve the conditions of the workers. I support the Farm Workers as much as I can. I think they do great work, but they're clearly not any longer the best symbol of Chicanoism. They're a good solid union.

M: In July of 1977, gun battles between Mexican police and gangs and Border Patrol people at Tijuana-San Diego were reported. Do you recall that, and did you have any involvement in that?

C: Yeah, we had sporadic shootings and incidents along the border. The most recurrent were along the Tijuana-San Diego area. I don't recall that specific one, but I do remember that there were periodically rock throwings and every now and then somebody would claim that some gunfire came from /an/ unidentified source. These were always very, very hard to try to

localize or get anything specific on. But yes, for a while the San Diego area became very, very violent and very dangerous. We even, toward the end of my term, did issue some bullet proof vests 'cause the officers wanted them. And we did present the Tortilla Curtain idea, interestingly enough, as a way to channel the traffic from the most dangerous areas. But that was true, there were some incidents. No one got shot, no Border Patrol officer that I know of was shot in that particular exchange in July of '77. There were a few people that were shot on other occasions--both Border Patrol and Mexican individuals who were shot.

M: Then there were some people who were trying to cross the border who were victimized by these gangs or the Mexican police.

C: Yeah. The San Diego area developed what was known as a no man's land, where you had to make it past the Mexican bandidos on the Mexican side, in some cases, you had to then get past the Mexican police; then you had to get past the U.S. Border Patrol, and then the U.S. bandidos. It was quite a gauntlet that people had to run through. And we had everything from rapes to assaults to robberies to killings--all sort of problems there in that very treacherous canyon area. The San Diego police even had a special unit of officers, created sort of like guerilla warfare officers. These were members of the San Diego Police Department who dressed themselves as undocumented and would sort of live out here in these areas, these no man land areas. These were all young Chicano officers, and they would take on the bandidos, the coyotes. It was some very tough duty. They were out there. They're all volunteers. They did win some commendations. But that was very rough.

M: Did you have any direct contact with them?

- C: Yeah, we helped create special units, we helped deploy special resources, we helped exchange intelligence with Mexicans. We also did some investigations of alleged abuse by and actual abuse it turned out, by U.S. Immigration officers. And I visited with the people down there every day. We had lots of ongoing activity. It was our busiest sector and the most problem-ridden sector.
- M: In October of 1977 it was reported in the press that you participated in the capture of 19 undocumented people. Do you remember that?
- C: Yeah. I made a trip to San Diego. And because I'm the kind of person that wants to see what's happening--I want to, as much as I can, experience the activity myself--I got in a helicopter one night about two a.m. And I was there as the helicopter pilot was going up and down. The searchlight was there, and I turned the searchlight on the field. I didn't see anything, but he did. And sure enough, when they turned the searchlight on, there were some people hiding under some bushes and things. I did do that that evening for a couple of hours until three, four in the morning--looking at it, and then later going down as well, and visiting. It's quite an experience. You feel very strange when you have that searchlight on those people down there. But that was the extent of that.
- M: You didn't do that again?
- C: No, I didn't do it again.
- M: That was the only time. Could you comment on the impact on the agency that the proposal to shift INS from the Justice Department to the Treasury Department had on the agency?
- C: Well, the proposal was a reorganization proposal. And the essence of it was to put all of the border enforcement, the border section of INS (that

would mean Border Patrol and some inspectors) in Treasury, outside of Immigration. The proposal took up a great deal of time. It was part of the President's reorganization project. It stirred all of the turf rivalries and tensions, and caused an enormous amount of heartache. At one point we had as many as 16 full time staff people working on developing all the mechanisms for making the transfer, people working within INS whose sole job is preparing for the transfer.

But the proposal was doomed in that the President was doing it as a result of a study. And it was a reasonable plan, which meant everybody had a shot at it and it drew tremendous union opposition as well as administrative, internal questions that were raised about it. But the reality was that moving the Immigration officers from the Immigration Service to Treasury would mean they'd go from the AFL-CIO to the National Treasury Employees Union, and that would mean that the AFL-CIO would lose a number of dues paying members. In addition to which there were lots of other concerns like grades and status and whatnot. The idea just caused enormous, enormous amount of turmoil within the agency. It eventually died, but it took a lot of our time.

- M: Are you suggesting that the crucial factor there was the unhappiness of the union with the proposal?
- C: That was one major concern. The other concern was a public relations problem with the government of Mexico. Well, not just public relations, but substantive questions were raised by Mexican government officials. The concern was that, see, Treasury inspects for things, not for people. And if you give full control of the border to the agency in charge of looking for things, you could cause an enormous number of problems. It would be

better to have control of the border with the agency that's concerned with justice, to the Department of Justice, if you gave control of the border to a more people-oriented agency. And so the Mexicans were quite concerned because they'd had a very bad experience some years before with a program called Operation...what was it called? It was the one where they stopped all the cars on the border.

M: Intercept?

C: That's it. Intercept. And they didn't want to see that happen again. So they're still unhappy with Customs about that and didn't want that agency to get back in primary responsibility. Because you see, under Intercept, and under people who think in terms of drugs and contraband, searches and techniques for searches and stops are broader and more thorough than they are under Immigration. See, that's where the dogs are, they's where some other things are that could cause lots of problems with Mexican government officials and with people that cross the border all the time.

M: Did the protest of Chicano groups have any impact?

C: Some of the Chicano groups raised concerns and they were very unhappy with that idea, and I think that was also another contributing factor to the downfall of that proposal.

M: You got criticism for participating in the making of radio announcements to inform indocumentados of their rights and opportunities to become legal residents. Can you comment on that? Operation Outreach, I believe it was called.

C: Well, yes, I set aside some money in the budget, a couple of thousand bucks, for radio spots that would help tell foreign nationals in the U.S. what their rights were. Well, these spots were set aside, they were done,

but they were never really aired. Before they could be aired, then Congressman Ilberg raised all kind of cane--went to the floor of the House, called me in and gave me a rough time in his office. We had bad exchanges. He demanded all sorts of things, threatened all sorts of things; was gonna do even more, he said. The end result of it was that we never did run those tapes, but they got more publicity than if they had been run. I think they're still in Washington.

M: What were you trying to do there?

C: Well, I was trying to inform the public of their rights and of their benefits under Immigration law, and I was also trying to help the Immigration Service. My view was that if a lot less people would come in totally ignorant of what they wanted or what they could do, it would save us a lot of time up front at the desk in all of these many, many offices. In other words, if somebody came in and didn't know that they were eligible, we could save ourselves one more question. We could also give people benefits to which they are legitimately entitled.

See, the essence of the argument was that I felt that a person who is entitled to immigration benefits should be treated the same as someone entitled to tax benefits. You should tell them about it, and they they should take them if they can. There's nothing wrong with telling people they have benefits. Congressman Ilberg took the view that, no, it's not analagous, that IRS benefits are different than immigration benefits; and that the burden under immigration benefits is on the alien to find out, we're not obliged to tell them about it. The radio spots were run by private groups in a few places in the country and now I think that under IASA we're gonna be running different radio spots anyway, nationwide.

M: Under IASA?

C: The Immigrant Aid Society of the Americas that we've created afterwards. We'll be running our own radio spots.

M: Could you tell me about the conversation that you had with the Congressman? You said that he gave you a rough time.

C: Well, he was very unhappy. He called us into his office, called me into his office, and we had more than an hour in which we just disagreed very strongly. He insisted that this was horrible, and he went on the floor of the Congress on several consecutive days in which he denounced me called it an abuse of discretion and misuse of federal money and all sorts of things. He really went off the handle like that.

M: Where is he from?

C: Philadelphia. He's since left the Congress. He was indicted and convicted on some other charges. He was the one involved in the Marston Case.

M: Which case was that?

C: Marston, the U.S. attorney from Philadelphia who was fired by Jimmy Carter but didn't want to leave 'cause he alleged that he was being fired cause he was investigating corrupt government officials.

M: Did you have anybody else who jumped on you?

C: Well, the only one who directly jumped on me was Ilberg, but obviously there were other people who jumped on me through the press or through other mechanisms.

M: In May of 1978, there was a ruling in the Texas Supreme Court that affected thousands of undocumented children here in Houston with regard to their access to education. Was your agency involved in that issue and in any other cases that had to do with the education of undocumented children?

C: Yeah, we argued for, and on behalf of, providing education for undocumented alien children. We helped develop the position for the Department of Justice whereby it would come in on the side of the children. So, yes we were involved, and they Department of Justice did argue later on behalf of these children.

M: You testified yourself?

C: Later. After I'd left the Service I testified. But I helped develop the position while I was in the Service, the argument that we should argue on behalf of the U.S. government that the U.S should provide education, or the school districts should give education to these children.

M: To what extent did you get involved with the migrants who were coming from the Caribbean area?

C: Well, we had, again problems and concerns about that group of persons. Many of them were coming of course as legitimate temporary workers through a program that's been in existence for years, where these workers would come into Florida and the /Southern/ states and work in different fields, different jobs, and then return home. We had some lawsuits involving Puerto Ricans, because Puerto Ricans argued that they hadn't been treated fairly, that foreign nationals would go and harvest where they were. But we had a number of lawsuits there and some other cases, but those were not as big, in a way--by big I mean as time consuming, though there were a few major cases--as some of the other cases in the southern area.

M: Did you go down personally to these areas where these people were hired, or to the Caribbean?

C: No, I never did go down there. I went to the Caribbean, but not as a result of those cases.

- M: We haven't talked about the Canadian border. Did you visit border areas up there?
- C: Yeah, I went to the Canadian border. I didn't go to enough places along the border, but I did go to a few places. There was very little traffic, very little work. Actually very small Border Patrol, very small number of Immigration officers in general along the Border Patrol. A lot of ports of entry, but most of these were one and two person parots. And the bulk of the work really was not with Canada. The Canadian border doesn't even require visas for Canadians to come in. The terms under which a Canadian can enter were much easier than on the U.S.-Mexican side. And the Canadians move across as a result of a system that developed over years. But they move across with much greater ease and merge much more easily into U.S. society than do the Mexicans and others from the south. It was never a whole lot of time.

Interestingly enough, though, on one or two occasions when there were issues involving Canadians, for instance, we had some problems with some woodcutters, people who worked on timber in Maine. Within a very short time we had Muskie, Senator Muskie and the other senator from Maine, just raising cane about /we/ ought to do something about these critical problems because the Maine workers were very unhappy that the Canadians were coming in and taking their jobs. We even had a little bit of violence up there-- somebody going after the other one with an axe, cutting down the doors to their homes and things, just, you know, scaring them. And some little violence or just fights and so on. But it involved at most a couple of hundred workers. It was nothing like /The/ southern border. But the senator from Maine he was on it in no time at all, demanded action right away.

They're much better organized on the east coast, certainly on the Canadian border.

M: Who is much better organized?

C: The political system up there is much more responsive, much more immediately responsive.

M: They get the politicians to react quicker to situations like these?

C: Yeah. Of course, it's a much smaller state. A hundred people in Maine is a big thing.

M: And also you're dealing with different constituencies, too--Mexicans along the southern border and Anglo-Americans along the northern border.

C: Yeah. Historically, the northeast and the Canadian border is much more powerful politically than is the southern border.