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Interview no. 1683

Hilda Villegas

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University of Texas at El Paso

Institute of Oral History

Interviewee: Hilda Villegas

Interviewer: Yolanda Chávez Leyva

Project: Voices from the Border Project

Location: Cafe Mayapan in El Paso, TX

Date of Interview: June 29, 2016

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Transcript No.: 1683

Transcriber: /summary:Ana Urias

Summary of Interview: Hilda was born in El Paso, Texas. She was raised in El Barrio Chamizal and attended Beall Elementary, Guillen Middle, and Bowie High School. She recalls that growing up in the community felt like home. She talks about the possible closure of Beall Elementary by El Paso Independent School District as an alternative to cutting costs due to underutilization of elementary schools. She feels that they are targeting areas in which the parents are not as engaged. The students would be redistributed into Zavala and Douglass Elementary Schools. Since it is one of the poorest areas in El Paso, mobility is a big issue. She believes that this will create more problems for the families and it will widen the gap in the quality of education. The community is a mixed commercial and residential areas and is located next to an international bridge which creates a lot of traffic, safety, and environmental problems. She states that the two remaining schools are close to highways and facilities which heavily contaminate the environment and have been proven to affect the health and development of their children. She believes that the district is excluding those that will be affected the most with this decision. She thinks that the district did not expect for them to fight back on this issue. Over the years, there have been people coming together to defend and voice the needs and political views of the community. The community is unique in that it is always in transition since immigrant families come and find stability due to affordable housing. Because of this it has been hard for them to come together and organize. Familias Unidas de Chamizal was created to provide the tools for the community to be able to deal with these issues. They fight for things that they need in order to function as a community including education, housing, and contamination issues. They make information accessible and clear to allow the community to define what they need. They want to take control of the decisions that affect their lives. She states that they must look at their history and how the community has evolved and has been systematically oppressed to get to this point. She feels that it is convenient to rely on and trust that their needs will be taken care of by others but they need to move forward to change that. They have found support outside of the community but do not necessarily agree on how the issues should be dealt with.

Length of interview 29 minutes

Length of Transcript n/a