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Interview no. 1764

Lezema

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Lezema

Interviewer: IOH

Project: Farah

Location: El Paso, Texas

Date of Interview: N/A

Terms of Use: Unrestricted

Transcript No.: 1764

Transcriber: Andrea Santos

Summary of Interview:

Lezama started her journey with Farah in the year 1959 and worked there for nineteenth years. She used to make jeans and sew other clothing items. Her first time in the company was when she was 17 years old, and she worked there for three months before taking a break and going back to the company for the next nineteenth years. Lezama mentioned that in her nineteenth years in Farah she never earned the 3 dollars that they promised her she would earn if she stayed with the company for a couple of consecutive years.

While working at Farah her supervisor would tell the employees that they had to make a certain number of jeans that day. Lezama could never meet the goal because the work was a lot for the little time they had. She mentioned that she would not go to lunch break to be able to finish her work, but still the time was not sufficient for the work she had. Sometimes she would not even go to the restroom in hours to at least make some progress in her work. Another frequent problem she had was that her sewing machine would not work so she had to switch stations and that made her lose a lot of time. At that point she was making little over 1 dollar an hour. She mentioned that her supervisor would tell every worker that if they did not meet the number of jeans they would get fired. Lezama was never afraid of being fired because she did magnificent work with the clothes even when she sometimes took a lot of time in some pieces.

At this point some of the other workers started to complain about the working condition and the treatment some of them would receive from their supervisors, as well

as how the supervisors would favor some employees and just all of them. The Farah company's poor pay, demands for increased productivity, routine disrespect for safety and health regulations, and swift firing of any employee who voiced concerns all contributed to the commencement of the walkout. As the strike began, Lezema noted that 85% of the participants were Chicana women. The walkout was labeled an unfair labor practice strike as other American workers reacted quickly to support the Farah workers. A month later, a national boycott of Farah products was started. In El Paso, the strikers began to gather in front of the companies and local stores that carried Farah products. Following a drawn-out two-year strike, the Farah company rehired fired employees, including Lezema. The company also bargains a contract to improve the working atmosphere.

Length of interview 1:54:57

Length of Transcript N/A