

*Civil Rights History Project
Interview completed by the Southern Oral History Program
under contract to the
Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
and the Library of Congress, 2016*

Interviewees: Carlos Montes

Interview Date: June 27, 2016

Location: Los Angeles, California

Interviewer: David Cline

Videographer: John Bishop

Length: approximately 2 hours, 18 minutes

START OF RECORDING

Female 1: From the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

David Cline: All right, today is June the 27th, 2016. This is David Cline from the history department at Virginia Tech, and working for the Civil Rights History Project of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian International Museum of African American History and Culture. And behind the camera today, we have John Bishop from Media Generation. We're also joined by Guha Shankar of the Library of Congress. And we have the great honor to be here in Alhambra today, in California, with Carlos Montes. And if I could ask you, this is the only time I'll coach you at all, is to introduce yourself with a full sentence. I am, or my name is, and when you were born, and where.

CM: Yeah. And I prefer to say LA, Los Angeles, yeah. Yeah, my name is Carlos Montes. I was born in El Paso, Texas, December 28, 1947. And I live in Los Angeles, California.

DC: Fantastic. And can you--let's just start with your childhood. Can you tell us a little bit about your people and where they were from? And then, and their journey, and then your journey here?

CM: Sure. No, absolutely. My parents are from the northern part of Mexico, Chihuahua, small little farming village. It's not even on the map, but it's near Parral, Chihuahua, a mining town. They were from Las Cuevas. Now, they moved up to the northern part of the border to Juarez, where they worked and lived. Now I was born in El Paso, Texas, across the border. So my parents, they crossed over there at the hospital, the Hotel Dieu. So the first five years of my life, I was raised in Juarez. I spoke Spanish, I went to a public school, my dad was a cab driver, my mother was a nursing assistant and a housewife. So it was a good life on the border--living on the border. It was good times in Juarez, Chihuahua, at that time.

DC: And siblings? Did you have siblings?

CM: Yes, yes, I have an older sister, Marilou - Lulu, also born in El Paso, Texas. And then my younger brother, Javier, also born in El Paso, Texas.

DC: And you lived there as a young child?

CM: Yes, yes. And then we moved briefly to El Paso, just for a couple of weeks. My parents--my mother already had resident status in the United States, so we were waiting for my dad to get his residency status, back then they called it the green card. And it was my mother's idea to move to LA, to Los Angeles. And it was a major move. I remember the day we were in the El Paso train station, small little train station, we were outside waiting for the train. We got on the train, and it was a long ride, but I remember the African American workers, I think they called them the Pullman, or the porters?

DC: That's right, Pullman porters, yeah.

CM: Right, they came by at night and turned off all the lights, where my mother was reading a little Mexican novel. But every so often I would tell, ask my mother are we there yet, in Spanish, "Ya llegamos? Ya llegamos?" she said no, no, no. And finally, when we got to LA she woke us up, "We're here, we're here!" I was like, in semi, not shock, but I was like whoa, whoa, we're here. And I remember getting to the train station, the Union Station in LA; it's a big Art Deco-Spanish combination design. It was humongous compared to the El Paso one. So, when I--when we got to the station, we walked through it to the main lobby. I knew we were in for a ride. I said, "Oh my God, this is a big station," you know? So, something told me that something in LA was going to be a major, major experience.

DC: And where did you all settle?

CM: We settled in south LA. My dad had come previously, got an apartment, he got a job in a furniture assembly-line factory. And so, we moved into south LA, they call it Florencia area, Florence area. I went to school there--we went to school there, elementary school, and started to learn English, what they call survival English.

DC: And did your parents eventually learn English as well, or did they mostly speak Spanish?

CM: My dad was fluent in English and Spanish, because he had come to the United States before to work, when he was younger. My mother, primarily Spanish. So she became a full-time housewife, where my dad worked at the factory. It was--I think it was called Mission Furniture. They produced coffee tables, and he was on the assembly line, he was also in the carpenter's union, industrial section.

DC: Right. So can you, and about what year was that, that you arrived?

CM: You know what? That was 1956, in the late '50s.

DC: So what's the racial map of Los Angeles in the mid-'50s?

CM: Right. Well, you know what, that area, south LA, was older whites; there was a few white families there, not very many. Blacks were moving in from the south, from Louisiana, Mississippi. We were coming from Mexico, so it was interesting. It was Chicano and black, and we got along pretty well, even though my mother didn't speak English, there was something about coming--I guess coming from another state and from a rural background that we got along. One of my neighbors, a young African American teenager, raised pigeons. Flying pigeons, or tumbling pigeons, and I was fascinated by that. And also, then my neighbors were one of the first, when I met the first *cholos*, or *pachucos*, or "gang members," if you want to stereotype it, they were from Florencia. They treated me really well, but I saw them--they had their low riders, they had their look, their--the beard, the hair dress, the tattoos. And I played ball with them and they treated me nice and they respected me, so I always respected the so-called pachucos, or cholos. And so, yeah, we went to school. I remember the first days of school, it was kind of interesting. I didn't know a word of English, so I had to kind of learn my first day in the cafeteria. I didn't know where to go get your food, and get your utensils. But there was always a young--.

DC: You remember that?

CM: I remember that, no I remember that--I remember those because -- there was a young Chicano there, the teacher told him, help him out, tell him where to go, what to do.

DC: How did you--. Do you remember knowing how you thought about yourself? How you defined yourself then? Because as you said, a young Chicano, were you thinking in those terms yet?

CM: No, no, not yet, not yet. No, I wasn't thinking. But the young guys, I saw them, that they were obviously Mexican, or Mexican American. I say Chicano because they looked like they were fluent in English, and they knew some Spanish. So I identified with them because they acted--they were visibly--they were brown, they had black hair, and their names were Jose, or Martin. So at least I felt comfortable in the school, in the classroom. The teacher was Anglo, white, blond, and trying to get me to say the name of the ball, and I just wanted to play with the ball, but they were trying to learn--teach me English, you know? English, basic English. But there weren't any English classes, or any English as a second language classes.

DC: Nothing at all.

CM: So I learned survival English.

DC: So as you went through school, how about the--what you were learning? Did you see yourself reflected in any of what you were being taught? How were they talking about, you know, Latinos, in the school system at that time?

CM: Yes, yes. No, I didn't see any of our history there, I didn't see myself in the history. You know? And especially in middle school and high school, I saw the US history, the Alamo version... the basic--the Founding Father, George Washington, etc. so there wasn't anything that I could identify with. I do remember one time they showed the movie, *The Alamo*, and the feeling among the crowd, or the students, was kind of uneasy, you know? We couldn't really articulate what we were going, but we knew that

something was wrong, [laughter] you know? Because they were glorifying Jim Bowie and Davy Crockett, and the Alamo, and “remember the Alamo.” We were saying wait a minute, we were on the other side here, really, why are you glorifying the other side? But we were young, and we didn’t know what was going on. But, there were experiences like that, that later on in high school, the racism was a little bit more blatant. I actually, before that--.

I’ll back up a little bit. When we were still living in south LA, I went to Miramonte Elementary School, and we used to like to go to the show in an adjacent city named Huntington Park. Now that whole area, southeast LA, was still primarily white, white working class, Huntington Park, Bell because they had the auto industry, [10:00] the steel industry. But I remember, we wanted to go to the show in Huntington Park. So, we walked over there, and we took the residential route, because of the--we wanted to walk on the lawn, because it was hot. And we saw a sign in the department building, said, “For rent, whites only.” Now you’re talking the late ’50s, ’56, ’57, it was my sister and myself, and we looked at the sign, and they go, whites only. We just said, we said to ourselves, they don’t want any blacks. And then we go what about us, we’re not white, we’re not black, I wonder what they think about us. So we didn’t answer it, we just kept thinking about it, you know? And--.

DC: So that’s one of the first times that that--.

CM: Yeah.

DC: --those kind of thoughts went through your mind. Yeah.

CM: Yes.

DC: Trying to make sense of something very complicated.

CM: Right, that's true. That's true. And then being in Huntington Park, it was mostly white, primarily white, you know? Now today it's 99.9 [percent] Mexican, Mexican [inaudible].

DC: So, looking back, are there other particular moments where you can start to see your sort of consciousness forming?

CM: Mm-hmm. In high school, I started to see the remarks by teachers, condescending remarks, sometimes racist remarks I would pick up on. I remember one specific day was, I think it was St. Patrick's Day. So we had a teacher talking about St. Patrick's Day, and wearing green, and then I was trying to articulate something a little different that we're not Irish, Irish American, we're Mexican. And I told them, but we're--our descendants are the Aztecs. I didn't know what I was talking about, I just kind of threw it out there. I had never studied history. And he made a statement, he looked at everybody, "Oh Carlos says you're all a bunch of Asstecs." He put an emphasis on the ass, that he's an Asstec. And he--and then everybody looked at me, and were all kind of embarrassed, and what are you--are you going to say anything? And I didn't say anything, but I kind of really got mad. I never forgot that, that instance, that one of the other teachers that was there, a younger Anglo American teacher, was, he got visibly embarrassed, I could tell, his face kind of got a blush, blushing? Yeah. And then, the history that we were being taught, it didn't show anything about our experience.

DC: Were there places that you could go to get--to start to get some more history about yourself and your people?

CM: No, no. Not that I recall in the--now I'm talking high school. In middle school, I was, it was black, Chicano students in south LA. But right before I completed middle

school, we moved to East LA, or Boyle Heights. Which was primarily Mexican American, Japanese American, and some black.

DC: For high school.

CM: Mm-hmm, right. So my high school experience, I started experiencing police abuse, police harassment. Because what we would do in East LA, we would go cruising, cruising Whittier Boulevard, that was Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. I would see the sheriffs stop people. And then later on, we got stopped. My friend was driving, and I remember one particular night they stopped us, and they went through the whole car, the backseat, the trunk of the car, and we kept telling them, what are you looking for, you know? He kept smirking at us, and I said, and we, and my friend finally told him, why did you stop us? He said he stopped us because the little light above the license plate was off. I said, "Is that the only reason?" And we ended up--no ticket, no arrest. But it was just, we saw it as just harassment. Later on, it happened again to me and my best friend Richard. And my best friend Richard told the police officer, "Hey, you can't do that." [Laughter] I remember the--excuse me, the police officer, and he happened to be a Chicano guy, tell him, "See this billy club? I could stick this billy club up your ass and bring it out of your mouth." I had told my friend, don't say anything, don't--these guys are crazy, you know? And he looked at them, and he looked at me, and then later, I told him, I told you, that's how they are, you know? Don't say anything man, these guys are like, are aggressive, and brutal. And--.

DC: So you learned that early.

CM: Yes, yes. Yes, cruising the boulevard, and watching people getting harassed, and getting [15:00] arrested, and us being harassed and stopped.

DC: [Laughter] All right.

CM: So, keep on giving me questions, because I kept talking, and I didn't know what--.

DC: No, it's good. No we're perfect, we're going great.

CM: I've got to get the feeling of where you wanted to go to, I don't know.

DC: No, so I'm just walking you through high school, and getting a sense of where this, as you started to sort of form a consciousness, a race consciousness. So I'm curious about that, and if that happened in high school, or after high school.

CM: Yeah, and OK, no, that was in high school that we were cruising the boulevard, and looking at, seeing the police harassment, the racist comments by the teachers, the experience going through high school, I felt like we're just going through the motions. I could tell there was a group of students that had books, that had glasses, always had pens that were being taken care of. But the rest of us were just kind of going through the motions of high school. I remember they put a big emphasis on ROTC, of joining the military training. They put a big emphasis on auto mechanics, industrial arts, and not a lot of emphasis on college preparation. I remember in my senior year, I went to talk to my counselor, and I told her I wanted to go to college. I was interested in going to college. She just kind of smiled at me like, and didn't say yes, this is what you've got to do. She said, "What, would you be interested in a bookbinding course?" Right, and I got--and I didn't know what she was talking about. I told her, I just kind of went off, I said I'd rather write the book than bind the book, you know? And she kind of like laughed at me and didn't do anything, and I ended up going to work after high school in the same factory with my dad. And it was hot, and it was a lot of sawdust, and it was for the summer, me and my best friend Richard went to work there. And then, we were saying

you know what? This is too hard. Let's go to college. We ended up going to East LA Community College.

DC: OK. Yeah. So you enrolled there, and what were you studying?

CM: I wanted to study political science, and I also got involved in student government. I ran as student body parliamentarian, got elected. I was trying out--I was trying different things. In high school, I tried cross country. I tried different clubs. One thing I really loved about high school, that kept me in school, was I took beginning band, and I was in the band, so I was in the marching band. So I will say that that's one reason I graduated, and completed high school. But in college, I wanted to try some different student government, and then I ran into this group called MASA, Mexican American Student Association, that was started by the older Chicanos coming back from the military, and the GI Bill. I started going to the meetings, I go, "What's all this MASA about?" The name MASA, obviously MASA used to make tamales, and tortillas, so I'm like, why are you using that name? I kind of confronted them, what's up, what's going on, what are you guys doing here? I'm with student government; we've got all these clubs, we're doing car shows, we're doing concerts. What's MASA about, right? And then they said, well we're going to be tutoring students, we're going to do scholarship fundraising. But I confronted them as to why they were using the name MASA. And the name, it was just a white sheet of paper I saw on a door, a Mexican--MASA, come to a meeting.

So, I went to the meeting, but what happened to me that during that confrontation with them, it kind of like, it--I don't know what you call it, but it kind of like clicked, I guess, or to use one of those old terms I used to say, it didn't blow my mind, but it made me click--you know what? They got something here, you're right. They're trying to help

Mexican Americans, which is us, they're doing this education thing. So I started going to the meetings, but since I was younger, I was more--I started telling them look, we've got to do what the blacks are doing. Because I grew up during the Watts Rebellion, '65. I was a janitor at an elementary school, so I hung out and worked with the blacks. And the blacks were arguing. One guy was saying yeah, we've got to rebel, we've got to burn. And the other black was saying no, we can't do that. I was listening to them, right? And that was '65. So later on, during the black power movement, and Malcolm X, and King, that influenced me watching everything on TV and the news. So I would tell the older Chicanos, we've got to be like the blacks. We can't just be doing tutoring and raising money to scholarships. And then [20:00] finally one time, I think they got fed up with me, and they go, "Well why don't you do that?" And they looked at me. And then I go, "You know what? OK, you're right. I will do it." [Laughter] So I formed another organization, called La Vida Nueva. Ended up--I did stick it out in MASA for a while. I tried to make it more active. Let's take on the antiwar movement, let's talk about ethnic studies, and they didn't want to move, so I said OK, I'm going to do my own thing. So we formed another group called La Viva Nueva, and we took on the issue of the war in Vietnam, the struggle for Chicano studies, and demanding more Chicanos go to East LA College, because back then it was sixty, seventy percent white. And being there in East LA, you know. So, that I think that was part of my beginning of my involvement in the Chicano movement. During the same time I got a job as a teen post director in Lincoln Heights. Lincoln Heights, you had Father John Luce, who was the--at the Church of the Epiphany, Episcopalian parish, who had brought in Eliezer Risco to publish the newspaper *La Raza*. I was working with the street kids, taking them to the

beach, the concerts, and working with them, and they would always tell me oh, we're getting harassed by the police, the schools are no good. And I remember one time, Father Luce and Eliezer Risco walked in with a stack of *La Raza* newspaper, and told me here, pass them out, you know? I said, "Well let me read it first." I started reading it; I go whoa, what is this stuff, you know? It was *La Raza* newspaper, and criticizing the government, the city, the war on poverty, articles about the farm workers. So I really got turned on, I go yeah, let's distribute it, you know?

DC: And had you read anything like that before?

CM: No. No. No. I think the most I had done, I think, in [19]66, or early [19]67. I had gone to a meeting at the Casa del Mexicano in Boyle Heights, where they had Dr. Julian Nava speaking, who was running for the school board, Sal Castro, a teacher, was speaking, and also Patricio Sanchez. So I was in the audience looking-- I said, what are these guys talking about; this guy wants to run? It kind of made sense, OK, this guy wants to run the school board, and he ended up winning, because later on we had to work with him on the walkouts. I was getting, I guess, exposed to political activism. When I was in MASA, I invited Bert Corona, who was with Mexican American Political Association, to talk about the war in Vietnam, so I could get MASA to take a position against the war. And they still wouldn't do it. That's why I ended up forming *La Vida Nueva*. *La Vida Nueva* was more activist-oriented, more direct action.

DC: So even in your first involvements, you had a sense of a number of different issues, it sounds like. The war, other--and some other issues.

CM: Yes, yes. In the beginning, it was going to school, education, right? But then in the issue with the war is that we found out that a lot of the people I grew up with in high

school are getting drafted, sent to Vietnam, and coming back dead. Now I had a student deferment, because I was at East LA College. So they're giving you, right. But I saw what was going on, and then what was going on in Vietnam, the killings and the bombings.

DC: So, and then--. So coming--so the next organizations that you formed then, that then started to move towards the Brown Berets.

CM: Right, right, OK. I was talking about La Vida Nueva, and my involvement at the teen post, where I got exposed to Father John Luce's Church of the Epiphany. I started going to meetings at the Church of the Epiphany. He had helped organize a group of young Chicanos called Young Citizens for Community Action, YCCA. And they were more like a civic organization, but they made the transition, or we made the transition, to Young Chicanos for Community Action, right? And then the radical transition to starting a coffeehouse called La Piranha Coffeehouse. Have you heard about that before, La Piranha?

DC: Gloria was telling us about--.

CM: OK, good.

DC: First, really being introduced--.

CM: To La Piranha Coffeehouse. Which was in [19]67, right. So then, yeah, the Young Chicanos for Community Action got a small grant from, I think the council of churches, [25:00] National Council of Churches, through the help of Father John Luce. Now Father John Luce was very instrumental. He wanted to lay the basis for some kind of organizing among Chicanos in the East Side, which included Lincoln Heights, Boyle Heights, East LA. So, yeah, right, La Piranha Coffeehouse, we opened it up in East LA

at the corner of Olympic and Goodrich. There was a big sign outside, La Piranha. And we started having meetings, concerts, hanging out, young people hanging out, and we started getting harassed by the sheriffs. Raiding us, lining us up against the wall, searching us, harassing us, no arrests yet. Following us. Giving us tickets for whatever reason.

And the first issue we took up--one of the first issues we took up, was the harassment of the cruising and the car clubs on Whittier Boulevard. Since I grew up doing that, I understood it. We started passing out flyers on Whittier Boulevard, know your rights.

They can't stop you for any reason, they can't search you. And we started--we held a rally in one of the gas stations there, and the sheriffs came and arrested David Sanchez.

And so we started doing that anti-police abuse campaign, and then it escalated when there was a young man found dead in the East LA sheriff's substation. Now they alleged that he had hung himself. But according to the news and the lawyer, he had been beaten. So we did a protest. Our first open protest was to protest the killing of a young Chicano. We said it was a killing of a young Chicano at the East LA sheriff's substation.

So we had a picket line in front of the sheriff's station. The sheriffs came out, started blocking us, trying to provoke us. We told everybody, just keep cool, they're trying to get you to get arrested. But we made the news, the local news. And we were accused of being outsiders, agitators, communists, outside agitators, and we said, we live here in East LA, you know? We live here, we go to school here; Garfield High School, I graduated from Garfield. And, but we saw, and people back then denied, there's no such thing as police brutality. It was a total denial of it. So that was our first kind of coming out, besides the Piranha Coffeehouse.

And then you'll have different versions of how the name came about, but--and who brought a stack of brown berets to one of the meetings one time, we passed them out, started wearing the brown berets, and people started calling us the Brown Berets. And eventually we formalized it, and we said we are the Brown Berets. And then we started putting out a newspaper, like that was the newspaper. First we wrote for *La Raza* newspaper, we'd write articles for it and distribute it. Then we came out with our own newspaper, we started--.

DC: May I ask in terms of strategy, as you're building this, and you're looking, I assume, at other organizations, and other struggles, what strategies were you picking and choosing? Because you talked about sort of the--. I was interested when you were talking about the first demonstration; were you adopting nonviolence? Were you also looking at black power and thinking maybe there's a different way of approaching this?

CM: Yeah, we didn't formally analyze and sit down tactics. We did the rally on Whittier Boulevard, we did--we flyered on Whittier Boulevard to the car club. We met with the car clubs, actually. And we made a presentation to them, to talk about organizing, fighting back. And we found out though that the sheriffs had been there right before us, to tell them that we were a bunch of communists and troublemakers. So the only ones that took our side were the more rowdy or militant car clubbers. They met with us later on, he goes hey, the sheriffs were here before, that was a--and we agree with you guys. And so we were organizing in our community. We didn't sit down and get training on what is organizing, we just started doing it out of the--our own initiative. And we would--. I did-- we did get influenced by the black liberation movement, what we read about and what we saw on TV and news.

But eventually, the Black Panthers did come to East LA, to La Piranha Coffeehouse, to meet with us. Yeah, Bunchy Carter, and John Huggins came to La Piranha Coffeehouse to talk about working together, and invited us to go to their office. And we would go over there, so we stressed the black and brown unity. And based on how they dressed, I think that influenced us, they wore a black leather jacket, the black beret, so we had the brown beret. Now [30:00] why did we pick the brown beret? Because brown--we started, the other part of this whole--the ideology behind it, we started acknowledging that there was this strong racism in the United States against brown people, against black people, against Chicanos, Mexican Americans, right? So, we said be brown, be proud. Brown pride.

So the brown beret is like, because the brown pride, and then also to be a--to put out a more militant approach, that we did not believe in nonviolence. We did not advocate violence. But we believed in self-defense. So the Brown Beret 13 point program, if you've had a chance to look at it, talked about self-defense, self-determination, education, freeing the Chicano prisoners, no to the war, it's a pretty long list of demands. But the main theme was self-determination for Chicanos. So we started taking on more of a--we went from a civil rights organization, the transition from the Young Chicanos for Community Action, to La Piranha, the Brown Berets. We became more of a, I think direct action, more of a--the other big thing I can--that we were different from the prior generation. The GI Forum, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the old CSO, they were talking about assimilation and integration. So we said no. We made a break. We said, "We don't want to assimilate. We want self-determination. And they were caught up in saying that we were white, and we should be white, and integrate. And we

were saying no, we're not white, we're brown. We're indigenous, we don't want to be part--we want to be our own people, want our self-determination.

So all of that was a political and cultural renaissance, revolution, or revolt. And tactics.

We believed that we needed to protest. So, the, by learning our history, by looking at the black liberation movements--. So the first picket at the police station, then we started taking on the issue of education. Since we all grew up in the local high schools, I was the only one of the Brown Berets who had gone to college. Who was in college. If you look at David and Gloria, and Ralph, and Cruz, Cruz had been in Vietnam, and had come back. But we were all poor working class Chicanos. Our parents were working class and poor, and I was one of the ones that--first generation from Mexico, David and some of the others had already been here for a while, their parents, and they didn't know Spanish as well as I did. I saw that difference, but what brought us together was unity and pride in being brown. And then we started using the word Chicano, not Mexican hyphen American, or Latin American, and so the tactics was that we needed to protest like the blacks. So we took on the issue of organizing massive high school walkouts in East LA.

DC: So two things. Did you use the term Chicano earlier in your life? Or was that--.

CM: I would hear my dad say it. My dad would say Chicanos, and he would also say La Raza. I heard it from him. So to us, we liked it, identified with it, because we preferred it to the hyphenation, or Latin American. It was our term of self-identification, self-affirmation, pride.

DC: It was there earlier, but you really started to use it in this determined way--?

CM: Yes, we started popularizing the Chicano power, Chicano movement. Before it was there, you know, with our parents, but it was popularized during the [19]60s, the Chicano power movement.

DC: Yeah, yeah. Do a save.

CM: How am I doing?

DC: Fantastic. So--.

CM: We cannot get anywhere, we've got to get it into it, yeah, yeah.

DC: We're getting there, we're getting there.

CM: We're getting there, good question though, good question. You've got those good questions.

DC: Well you are--you just set me up for the next question, which was about the school walkouts. So, can you tell us about the —origins of the Chicano Blowouts or walkouts?

CM: Yes. OK, conditions in the East LA high schools were really bad. Overcrowded conditions, high dropout rate, lack of ethnic studies, old facilities, antiquated facilities, lack of--an emphasis on industrial arts and the military. Right? I remember when I turned eighteen at Garfield High School, they called me into the AP's office, and I go, oh what happened, what's going on? And they had me sign for the selective service.

[35:00] Yeah, I was saying why would the school do that, you know? Well you're eighteen, you've got to sign up. Oh man, you know? I didn't like that, but I didn't start rebelling until later on. Later on, I would start objecting to everything, when I was in the Brown Berets.

So what happened is that we started having meetings at the, at the Church of the Epiphany, with students and teachers. Especially Sal Castro. And they were starting a series of student committees that were set up in Garfield, Roosevelt, Lincoln, and Wilson, to start talking about educational issues. There were surveys done about the needs, and these surveys were presented to the school board, to Julian Nava, that I mentioned earlier. I go oh OK, he won, right? And nothing was done, nothing was done. So we started, what I use the word now, agitating, but back then I would say leafletting, outreach, doing outreach, going to schools, passing out flyers. Criticizing the conditions, and then just popularizing the word walkout. And then, it created a kind of tension and controversy, what's this, what's all this walkout? This went on for months, like the dropout rate, and we would show pictures, cartoons of the schools as prisons. Because they would literally lock the restrooms--lock the gates to get in and out.

DC: Were the students immediately responsive? Or were they kind of hesitant, this idea of oh--.

CM: No, some were down; some were very open to it. So we would give them flyers, they would pass them out. Some were not, and we had parents that were against us. I remember going to a meeting at Garfield High School where the principal had organized a meeting to talk about these flyers and what's going on. What's this rumor about a walkout? And conditions. But what it was, really, the principal and the VP, AP rather, talking about what they're doing, how great Garfield is, and I'm sitting there, no, no, this is not true. I went through Garfield, I barely graduated, you know? And so, we walked into that meeting, we took--I told everybody, take off your brown berets, we're going to walk in there and then--and I could see it was kind of like a public relations meeting, that

things are fine. So I started asking questions, what about the dropout rate? What about the library? The library's really old. You know, and what about this?

And this--and then the assistant principal remembered me, so he called me out by name, "Oh Carlos, I hear what you're saying, but we're working on things, and things are better." And then some parents, they were raising their hands and saying, we want to know what's going on, if somebody's talking about doing a walkout. We just kept quiet though, we didn't want to say, yeah, we're doing a walkout. So this went on for months, with popularizing the idea that the conditions of schools are bad. There were student strike committees set up in all the major high schools in East LA. [We] went to community meetings, we went to board meetings, and the students presented a set of demands to the school board, and the school board said we're going to study them. So as to who or what, who called the walkouts, everybody takes claim for that, right?

But I remember going to the meeting on I think it was February, or March the 5th, on a night, nighttime, I went to the Church of the Epiphany, in the basement. I met with Eliezer Risco, me and a couple other Brown Berets, and he goes look, tomorrow--he goes, we want to do something. You down? I go, "Yeah, what are we going to do, what are you going to do?" He said, "Why don't you guys go to Lincoln High School, and run in there at ten o'clock and start yelling walkout?" And I go, "OK, sure." You're like twenty years old, you're not going to like--. Nowadays somebody tells me that I go wait a minute, what's the plan? You going to call the meeting? You're going to call parents, right?

So me and this other guy said OK, we're down for that. I didn't realize that the students had already been meeting, and had talked about walking out at ten o'clock March the 6th.

But remember it was--all this groundwork had been laid before, right? So, yeah. The next day, March 6 at 10:00 a.m., I ran into Lincoln High School, straight up the front quad into the main admin building. And me and this other guy named Richard B. Hill started yelling "Walkout." I had my beret on, and I'm trying to remember if we had our patch by then, I think we did. No, maybe not. But, we started yelling "Walkout," and then teachers came out, students, what's going on? This is the walkout? Yeah, this is it, this is the walk--then, an administrator came up and said what are you doing, you're trespassing, get out of here. I go "Look, this is serious, we're doing a walkout." "No, you can't." [40:00] "Yes, we can."

So then, before you know it, thousands of students started to come out of all the different buildings, marching out, it was beautiful. Marching, coming out of Lincoln High School on Broadway, North Broadway Street. And there's pictures of marching up and down Broadway, and rallying in front of the school, students getting on top of cars, and posters with "Chicano Power," "Education," all the main demands. We wanted equitable education, Chicano studies, bilingual education, better facility, more schools, and that went on for two weeks.

DC: So did you present the demands in a formal way to--.

CM: Not that day. Not that day. It was, I don't recall, we did it later on at the school board. But what happened, the school board started having meetings, and discussions. We marched to a local school board district office. But since our job was to get the other schools out, right, after Lincoln started, then we ran over to Roosevelt High School. By the time we got to Roosevelt High School, they had already chained up the gates, the front gates, the side gates, so we couldn't get in.

So we were on the Mott Street side of Roosevelt, where there was a driveway with a gate, and students were trying to push out--come out. They were like bunched up, pushing, pushing. I told them, just push, push. And one of them threw a rope out, and here, put it on. So we tied it to the gate, and we started pulling on this side, and they kept pushing, and eventually, the chain popped. The chain popped open, and the gates flew open and oh, the whole flood of students came out. And they go oh, my God. I was like--and I turned around, kind of catching my breath. And there was guy across the street with a white shirt and a tie, with a big camera taking photographs. We found out later on that was a police photographer. So I have that photo, I have a photo of that.

So, there was two weeks, we went to Garfield, we went to Belmont. Wilson had already started walking out. They--and they started on their own. So for two weeks, students walked out and marched to local district schools, we had--we went down to the school board to present the demands, and we wanted Julian Nava, who was our Chicano, to fight for us. And he did OK, but we--I thought he could have done a lot more. Sal Castro was suspended, because he was a teacher at Lincoln High School, who was eventually fired, but then the whole campaign to reinstate him took--that took months to get him back. And that was a victory. There was a sit-in at the school board that went on for days as part of the demands.

So eventually, we started getting more Chicano teachers hired, more Chicano administrators. They did have Mexican American studies, they had a plan to open another high school in 1972, there was a brand new high school built in East LA, called the New Wilson High School. The old one became a middle school. So, we made victories, we made gains. And we started even having ethnic, Mexican American studies. Even

Mexican food started being served. And bilingual programs started being implemented, and more of an emphasis on college preparation.

DC: So were you--and were you still in school yourself at this point?

CM: OK, this is [19]69, I was part-time at East LA College. Yeah, yeah, because--.

DC: OK, I'm just wondering how you were getting by. How do young revolutionaries support themselves?

CM: Yeah, I don't even remember how. We didn't eat. We didn't eat, we didn't sleep. We didn't have any cell phones or car. I had a job as a teen post director for a while. So I saved a little money on that. And then, well, at that time I still lived with my parents. There it was right there. I lived with my parents. So--.

DC: And how were your parents reacting to this?

CM: Well they were reacting pretty good. But later on, when the police harassment started, my mother started becoming preoccupied, or concerned with my safety. And she would tell me that. Now the thing with my dad, he was a union steward in the carpenter's industrial section. And when I was a young man in elementary school--I forgot to mention that he [45:00] took me to a union meeting, a picket line during a strike, I remember the union meeting was so exciting. All the young--not these young, but all these older men arguing and yelling, hey this is exciting, it's a union meeting.

DC: So you'd seen sort of a model for some of this. Yeah.

CM: What's that?

DC: You'd seen sort of a model for some of this organizing.

CM: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah the unions, absolutely, absolutely. I remember to get in the union meeting, you have to have a password. So they gave me the password.

[Recording stops, then restarts.]

DC: OK, so you started to taste a little bit of victory and some motion forward. And then--.

CM: In the whole educational field, right. We made some gains, made some victories, because of the walkout, direct pressure, I will say that everyone was shocked that young Mexican American, Chicano kids would walk out. It--they labeled us, the sleeping giant woke up. It made national news, that these massive high school walkouts, and it's part of our history. They became popularized. It's a tactic now that's used throughout the United States, throughout the Southwest. They started having walkouts in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, that same year. And then, a tactic is even used during the immigrant rights struggle in 2006, where 40,000 students walked out on February the--excuse me, March 27, in California.

So, we made gains, but one of the things that did happen, there was a secret grand jury convened by a DA, Evelle Younger. And I say secret grand jury because they took testimony. We didn't have the right to be there, or have attorneys to hear the testimony, or cross examine. So they had police, they had alleged witnesses, photographs, and they came out with an indictment, grand jury indictment, to arrest thirteen of us, we became known as the East LA 13. The main charges were conspiracy to disrupt the peace, conspiracy to disrupt the school system; there was over a half a dozen charges. They were all felonies. When you disrupt the peace or disrupt a school, it's a misdemeanor, but when you conspire to do that, it becomes a felony. So these are all felonies. There was, I said over six different felonies, a variety, they threw the book at us. [Laughter]

DC: And this was all the organizers of the walkout?

CM: Yes, yes. OK, the majority were the Brown Berets. There was--. But also Sal Castro, and an adult, Patricio Sanchez, Mangas Coloradas. No women were arrested, and no priests. It was Carlos Montes, Ralph Ramirez, David Sanchez, Fred Gomez, Cruz Somera [?], Saul Castro, Eliezer Risco, Pat Sanchez, did I say Sal Castro? There were thirteen of us, and I forgot a couple of names. So they thought it was funny that it was thirteen people, so we used to be the East LA 13. The number thirteen is popular in East LA, trece, thirteen; a lot of different gangs or groups have used the number thirteen. When I grew up in South LA, the gang there, Florencia Trece, the Florence Thirteen gang, you know? So it was funny that they used thirteen, they arrested thirteen. Now the only thing is that we were already--I was in Washington DC during the Poor People's Campaign. So, we were super active in 1968, right? The police brutality issue, the walkout issues. We get an invitation. Eliezer Risco from *La Raza* says, "Hey, come here, I want to talk to you, there's a poor people's campaign in DC. There's a bus leaving South LA tomorrow morning, you want to go? Or I think, or that same day, I forget. And we said, "Yeah, we want to go. Or go, get down to that bus." Just grabbed some clothes, took some newspapers. We get down there; the bus was about to leave. We made it a point--there was me, Ralph, David, I don't know if Gloria was there. A couple of us, I forget the exact delegation, we made it a point when we walked on the bus, we were in South Central, like we're going to go to the back of the bus. So it was solidarity.

DC: Gloria was there, because she told us.

CM: She was there, she said that? Did she say that story?

DC: She told about--yeah, yeah. I won't ruin the, what happened at the back of the bus, yeah.

CM: You won't ruin what?

DC: It's not always so good to be in the back of the bus sometimes.

CM: Right, right, right. Oh, because of the restroom, or what? [Laughter]

DC: That's what she was talking about.

CM: Yeah no, but we were like, we wanted to be in solidarity with black--you know?

[50:00] And remember, I--when I was in South LA, I grew up with blacks, I was in middle school, Edison Middle School; it was fifty percent black and Chicanos. So to me, when I moved to Boyle Heights in East LA, the Black Panthers started coming over, I thought it was natural to have black and brown unity, even though there were some blacks in the Black Panthers, and some Chicanos in the Berets, who didn't want it, who had prejudice, right? That we had to fight. So yeah, we got on the bus, and it was a couple of weeks of--I think our first stop was Phoenix. I think--was it Yuma or Phoenix Arizona? And we had a stop, had dinner, held a rally and a march, every city along the way, there would be a rally or a march.

It was really awesome. I would say it was an experience for me and the rest of the Berets, because we had been exposed to other races, other cities, other conditions, to see that there was poor people all over. And there was Chicanos along the Southwest. When we were in El Paso, Texas, my hometown, I realized the more blatant racism of the sheriffs, the police there. Yelling at us, "You better stay in the Coliseum and you guys can't come out," being very overly aggressive. More so than the East LA sheriffs, they said, "We're angry," I told everybody man, we're in Texas, we better watch out. But every city we had the solidarity of the host committees; feeding us, housing us.

DC: How did that feel to sort of see so clearly that this was bigger, that this was a bigger movement?

CM: No, it started to show me that it was a big movement, a big movement of poor people, a multiracial movement, because I started seeing Native Americans in Arizona join the troupe. And then, Chicanos from Campesinos, or farmers from New Mexico joined us. And I go wow, this is the real thing, not just farm workers who worked the field, but people who actually had a small little ranch, sheepherders and ranching, right? Peasants, small farmers, small ranchers who were fighting to recover the land, to take back the land. Now that's another thing I want to point out, that in June of [19]67, Reies Tijerina and a group of members of the Alliance of Free City States, Alianza Federal de Mercedes, lead a raid in Tierra Amarilla where they went to arrest a district attorney for violating their rights, and they resisted, so there was a shootout.

So there was a raid on Tierra Amarilla that was shot, heard worldwide, and in East LA, it made a major impact on us. Where I politically changed, made a political transformation, I guess you could say, that this is not just for education stuff, police abuse. This is for land, this is for our nation, this is for self-determination. So that was a major political revolution in our minds, of the Brown Berets. This was for Chicano power. This was not just for civil rights. This is for revolution, and we started studying the revolutionary movements in Mexico, primarily Zapata, —and Villa, and then we started hearing about Cuban and the Vietnamese people made a big impact on me. That this poor peasant economy was fighting the US Army, the US military, and eventually defeated it. Right? And that they wanted self-determination, they wanted socialism, so we started getting influenced by the more leftist radical examples.

The other thing that I'll point out is that Black Panthers were the ones that first gave me the Red Book, Mao Tse-Tung's little red book. At first we thought it was kind of cute, but we started reading it, it sounds pretty nice, you know? We made a joke about it, Mousy, because we had nicknames in East LA. Chicanos have nicknames for everybody, Louie, Little Louie, and Chewie, and Freddy, and then we said Mousy, Mousy, oh, Mao Tse-Tung, Mousy says this. Yeah. [Laughter] So, but the Chinese Revolution, we didn't study it in depth. The major impact to me was the Vietnamese, the black liberation movement. And then, stories from my mom, that my grandfather was in the Mexican Revolution, I met my grandfather. We would go back to Mexico every year when we were young. I talked to my grandfather, he showed me his gun, his sombrero. He had a wooden leg that he had been shot, [55:00] and they had amputated his leg, so he had a wooden, not a whole leg, just a, what do you call it? A wood--.

DC: Peg leg.

CM: Peg leg. Peg leg, peg leg, there you go. But I could tell he was a real strong man. So, where was I at, the transformation part? The--so we got arrested.

DC: And so, moving across the--.

CM: We're moving across the Poor People's Campaign, we get to Albuquerque, and we meet the farm workers, the people that took over the land, or fought for the land. Then we get to Denver, Colorado, and we see all the families, where the Brown Berets was young men and women. We get to the Crusade as well as Alianza, where the whole family were members. The mom, the dad, the kids were like--we liked that, that approach, that organizational approach. We were mostly young Chicanas, Chicanos, but we liked that. And then, after we left the Southwest, we started picking up poor working

class whites and blacks at--I'm trying to remember, Missouri, I forget what comes after Colorado. My memory's starting to fade a little bit, but I remember being in Louisville, Kentucky, we've--all we could remember. The Derby, we went down to the racetrack and marched around the racetrack. And afterwards I said, what the hell are we doing at a racetrack? There's nobody here anyway. We were just trying different stuff. We were young and down for something, right? And what else did I want to, so then--

DC: Well what about some of the other personalities that people, the other leaders from the other communities, like Corky Gonzalez?

CM: Right, right. Well we got to meet them, right? You know, we got to interact. I mean, they were in different buses, right? And then, but once we got to DC, we really got to meet them closely, and watch them in action, and learn from them, and get to know them. Corky Gonzalez, a very respected leader from Denver, Colorado; we found out that he had been a boxer, a businessman. He had been in the Democratic party, had tried that and he gave it up. He said, we've got to build our own organizations. And had hundreds of members, whole families were there. And then, of course, and then of course, Tijerina, the Alianza Federal, the farm owners. I don't want to use farm workers, because they were-- they owned their little farm, and they worked it. And the Native Americans that came with us, the Navajos, so, it really opened my mind up to see that this was the wider struggle, and then in Virginia, and Appalachia, the poor whites, they joined us, you know? That they were really poor, you know? In education and jobs and housing. So I realized that this was a struggle not against the white man, or the honky, it was a struggle against the system, the corporate system, the rich people against the poor people, but that blacks and Chicanos had a particular demand for self-determination.

DC: So in DC, what was the scene?

CM: Every day was a big protest. Yeah, the ones I remember were marching on the US Supreme Court, supporting the Native American rights for land, water, fishing, we were--every day we supported different issues, different struggles. And marching up the US Supreme Court, I remember we were marching up there with the Native Americans leading it, and with black, Chicanos, and whites. And as soon as we got up to the door, or up the stairs, we saw that the police closed these big giant doors. Boom, it was so symbolic that as soon as we got there, they closed the big doors to the Supreme Court, and the Native Americans started banging on the door. And we decided to do a sit-in, and we did a sit-in that whole day all around the US Supreme Court.

I remember marching on the--they used to have the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, where Jesse Jackson lead that march. We were going to raise the issue of food for poor people, food and jobs. And the tactic, I thought, was really great, because we all marched into the building, and we said we're all going to go to the cafeteria and we're going to get our tray of food, and go to the cashier, and Jesse said, "Everybody just go through and don't pay. I'll be the last one." So we said all right, let's do it, let's go, we're going to get some food. And then what he did at the very end, he said we're not going to pay as a protest to poor people, that we demand food for all [1:00:00] poor people in the United States. So it was a protest. Civil disobedience.

So I started learning all these tactics, and I started--we started, you know, the Brown Berets, wow, there's a lot of things we could do. We did another march where we got attacked by the Washington DC Police. I forget which one, where Ernesto Vigil I think was arrested. And we stayed at-- every day was a different march, and what started

happening is the--I started to see that the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the leaders were sometimes apprehensive of what we wanted to do. We wanted to be more militant, more direct action. I remember that Martin Luther King had invited the participation of the Chicano movement, so he could--which was the original idea of the Rainbow Coalition, the original Rainbow Coalition, had Chicanos, have Native Americans, whites, and blacks. And then, that was in February and March, and he was assassinated.

So remember that crusade, the Brown Berets, and Alianza did not believe in peaceful nonviolence tactics. I know that some of the tenets, like Reverend Abernathy, were concerned about that. But we--but he couldn't renege on the invitation of King, so we were in the march. And we pushed the envelope many times, the young people, the young Chicanos and blacks, we started getting a little, what should I say? Uptight with the older leadership. And we said, we're going to do our own march. So, the young people, we're going to do our own march. Because there were marches every day. So we said, we're going to do our own march for youth, for young people, for education, for jobs, for young people. So we recruited blacks, Native Americans, Chicanos, and we're going to march on the White House. Yeah, right. And then Abernathy and them said no, no, you know, don't--what are you guys doing? You should do--so they sent some of the Chicano elders to talk to us, and they didn't try to talk us out of it directly, but I knew that's what they wanted us to do, not to do it. But we did--we respectfully said we're going to do it. They said OK, go do it. We got our ass kicked. [Laughter] We got arrested. So we marched on the White House, we marched on the White House, we

wanted to have a meeting with LB, was it LBJ? Was that LBJ back then? I forget.

[Recording stops and restarts.]

DC: Yeah. OK, marched on the White House.

CM: We marched on the White House. And as we got there, we got attacked. We got outmaneuvered. We had the White House security in the front, I don't know if there was White House security, they weren't Secret Service, they didn't look like [them] because they were wearing uniforms and hats. And then, they confronted us, but then to the back, it was the Washington, DC police, so they got us. They just pushed us down, beat us up, put our hands way up to our neck, and pain, oh man, picked us up, and literally picked us up and threw us in the paddy wagon. But one thing I will note is I got abused and hit, but I didn't bleed. But the young black guy was bleeding on his head, he popped him in the head. I always notice the difference for blacks, they always made it worse. And then, we had already been there for a month and a half, two months I think. So went to court, got bailed out, so ask me another question. Just a whole lot of stuff happened over there.

DC: So where were you staying? You were staying over at--.

CM: We were at the Hawthorne, was it the Hawthorne School?

DC: Yeah, the school.

CM: Yeah, Hawthorne School. We were staying at Hawthorne School, that's where all the Chicanos and Native Americans were staying there.

DC: And did you go down to Resurrection City?

CM: We did. We went down to Resurrection City, we would go down there. We would--we didn't stay there, you know, and later on, when it started raining and flooding,

and getting hot, we were saying man, good thing we didn't stay there, because it got flooded.

DC: Right, right.

CM: And it was really crowded, but we would go there. You know, we would go down there and have meetings with the blacks and the other groups. So we met a whole lot of different organizations. We met Puerto Ricans, met blacks from different organizations, different cities, whites from the South, and Appalachia, Native Americans. It was a major learning experience.

DC: So what do you think, I mean this might not be an easy one to answer, but what do you think the effects were on the Brown Berets of having participated?

CM: Well it definitely opened up our mind; you see there was a wider struggle, wider struggle in the US. Before that, we used to blame white racism and oppression on the white man. The white man is the enemy. The honky, the white man, the whitey, right? And to me, the [1:05:00] beginning of the poor people experience and all of that changed to say it's not the white man, it's the one percent, that's used nowadays, or the corporate structure, or the rich people. And the rich corporations is the enemy that they monopolize and they discriminate. So, it was a major, I started seeing, I guess you could call it class analysis, it was the upper class and the working class, and that it was a wider struggle. It wasn't just LA or the Southwest, it was a national struggle. And even so that it was a worldwide struggle, the example of the Vietnamese, Africa, Latin America, against the US domination of their economies, politically, and militarily. Like in Puerto Rico or Cuba, right? And so, it was a political transformation for me and many of the other Brown Berets. But I think not all the Brown Berets made that transformation.

DC: So, and just, I just want to get the chronology right, in terms of the East LA 13, and then the Poor People's Campaign.

CM: Yeah, OK.

DC: So you were indicted, and--.

CM: Well we were indicted when we were in the Poor People's Campaign. We were in Washington, DC.

DC: OK. So you were there when the indictments came in?

CM: Right, we had a meeting, Corky Gonzalez called us, he goes hey, there's warrants out for your arrest. I go, what? For what? We goes, you know, for something we did here? No, no, you guys got indicted. He got a call, telegram, that back in LA, the grand jury had indicted us, and there was warrants out for the arrest of myself and Ralph Ramirez, who were in DC. And that the other people who had stayed in LA, David Sanchez went to Arizona, he went back, he didn't go all the way on the trip. And Gloria Arellanes wasn't indicted. Now I don't remember how far she went on the trip.

DC: She was in DC for about three weeks, and then she went home.

CM: Oh, OK. OK. So then, the other East LA 13, their homes or businesses were raided, and arrested. And they went on a hunger strike, and then they got bailed out. There was rallies. We were in DC, so we decided to go underground, semi-underground. We started taking our brown berets off, I think I may have shaved, you know? [Laughter] And then we were fearful for being--getting arrested. We knew that the Poor People's Campaign was being spied on by the local police and the FBI, and we suspect that there may have been infiltrators within the Poor People's Campaign. We never proved who it was. And--.

DC: Did you ever have infiltrators within the Brown Berets themselves?

CM: Yes. Yes, we did. We did, we did, we did, yeah, yeah. OK, so you want me to talk about that a little bit? No, absolutely. No, when we--OK, so then we stayed in DC for a while. I think we went to New York, came back, and then we met with Puerto Rican youth activists, and then the Southern Christian Leadership Conference threw us back. They wanted to get all the militants back, so we came back to LA, we didn't stay in East LA. We stayed in Echo Park, we rented a room, we stayed underground; we were not going to turn ourselves in. And what happened is one time, David Sanchez came to visit us, and his driver, Richard Avila, was an undercover cop, LAPD. Yeah. So what he did, I don't know how he did it, he came to see us, and then evidently they were being followed by another cop. Sergeant Lee Cevallos [?]. They're with the public disorder intelligence division, PDID.

So what happened, when we got in the car to give us a ride, they stopped the car. The sergeant, the undercover sergeant called the regular LAPD patrol car, stopped us, and then they stopped us. And we're in the backseat and we just say don't say nothing, don't say nothing. They already knew who we were. So they go, you're under arrest, come on, you guys are under arrest. Like what the hell, how the hell--we didn't know that the driver, Richard Avila was an undercover cop. He had come and joined the Brown Berets, he said I'm from Lincoln High School. He looked like a high school student, had a baby face. I'm from Lincoln, I want to join. OK great, come on in. And he got really close to the prime minister, David Sanchez, and became his driver, and his, you know, little hanging out with him. I had noticed that after he had [1:10:00] joined, he would always criticize or contradict some of the things that I would say--we would say, you know, little

things like we would say, yeah--. We would criticize everything about the US, America, apple pie, oh, apple pie is American. He would say, "Oh I like apple pie," like we should be eating Mexican food or other pastries. Or the American flag, "Oh nothing wrong with the American flag, just thirteen colonies." Oh man.

And later on, he was a cop; he was spying on us. He was sent in by the public disorder intelligence division to gather intelligence. And then, the sheriffs also sent in another guy called Robert Acosta. Now him, they didn't change his name, Robert Acosta, his real name, where Richard Avila, his real name was Richard Avina. Yeah, and then what the-- I don't remember when we discovered him, that must have been when we got out, we came back to LA, we got bailed out, but one time we were at the Brown Beret office, and Hilda and Gracie Reyes, the Brown Beret women, I'm sure Gloria talked about them, came running, screaming to the office, hysterical. And I go, "What happened? What's going on?" "He's a cop, he's a cop, Richard's a cop." I go, "What are you talking about?" They're saying--they're just hysterical, screaming "Richard's a cop." I go, "What are you talking about, he's over there." At a local popular hamburger stand, which we always ate, on Soto and Chavez. We--I said, "What are you talking about? Let's go."

So we walked over there. And let me go see what's going on. I walked over there, there was four patrol cars with four cops, all in uniform, hanging out, and then I looked, and one of the guys was Richard, so called Richard Avila, Richard was in full uniform. Just looking at us, smirking. So to me, they were trying to blow our mind, doing what I call psychological warfare, just to show. But they did it, everybody was hysterical, in shock that this guy's a cop, man, all this time he was a cop. And here he is, in full uniform,

with all these other cops. Because they figured we'd try to kick his ass or something. So, they were there to protect him, and they stuck around for a while, then they left. So we became a little bit more paranoid, we started doing security checks on people. They sent in another guy to join, another guy, Fernando Sumaya. They used his real name. And because we said, they'll give you a fake name, they'll give you a fake address, or fake identity, and he said he went to Calexico High School.

So, Ralph called the school, and they go, "Yeah he graduated from here, yeah." So we said OK, he's a real guy. But he didn't--we should have asked him, where did you send his transcripts? Sent his transcripts to the LAPD. [Laughter] Anyway, but this guy, he had tattoos, long black hair, long mustache. He wore kind of like the barrio getup, the ghetto clothes, but he was a cop. But OK, so he joined, so then there were two at the same time. So then the other guy, Richard, transitioned out. Now this guy, Fernando Sumaya, he always had a gun, and he always advocated, let's go shoot up, let's go do stuff. So he was more of a provocateur. He would say, let's go shoot up the Safeway store, because they're selling grapes, they're not boycotting grapes, let's go firebomb them. He always wanted to do more stuff. If anybody disagreed with the Chicano movement, or the black movement, he'd [say], "Let's go shoot them, let's go beat them up." At first I just thought he was a militant young tough guy, you know? I'd go, "No, you know, we're not going to do that kind of stuff," you know?

But eventually, he did get a couple of guys who had been to Vietnam, two Chicanos, Al and Billy, Al Osevas [?], Billy Rivas, had been to Vietnam, they were actually 82nd Airborne. So they were down; he got them to go with him to go firebomb Safeway. And they got caught, and they were waiting for them, the police. But before that, he started

some fires at the Biltmore Hotel during an educational conference called The Nueva Vistas Conference on Education, where Ronald Reagan, governor, was supposed to speak. And Max Rafferty, Secretary of Education. So we had had protests there, we organized protests. And we found out about it, because we knew that he was against bilingual education, he was against social programs, the governor, Reagan.

So we had a picket line outside protesting, we had people inside during the speakers, and started what we called the Chicano handclap. We started clapping, and disrupting the speeches. And we had meetings in the [1:15:00] rooms to plan this stuff. Now, Sumaya was in those meetings. We had a meeting at East LA College with the Brown Berets and La Viva Nueva to plan the protest. Fernando Sumaya was there. So when we got to the Biltmore Hotel, there was police there, there was firemen there, and there was also the state police. Because of Reagan. Right? So we did our protest, Fernando Sumaya, there were several fires set in the hotel. We don't know who set them. We know for a fact that he started one fire, a small fire in a restroom. Right? And nobody got arrested that day. The only people that got arrested were the people that disrupted the speeches by getting up during the speaking event. And these are misdemeanors, and then they got bailed out, right? But it was some time later that there was a second grand jury indictment, for conspiracy to commit arson. Yeah. Yeah. And arrested ten people. Several Brown Berets, several professors and students. And the only testimony or evidence they had was Fernando Sumaya saying these people met, they had all these protests.

DC: The guy that started the fires.

CM: Right, right, right. And then the first day in court, four people had the charges dropped, boom, no evidence, they dropped everything. So that left six people. So that

was the Biltmore Six. That became the famous political case, the East LA 13 and then the Biltmore Six. And we had our famous attorney, Oscar Zeta Acosta, known as the Brown Buffalo, who wrote the book, *Revolt of the Cockroach People*, was our attorney. He challenged the Constitutionality of the grand jury being discriminatory, because there were no Chicanos in it. And it's a long story, but we subpoenaed the judges to come to testify. We had judges, we had Superior Court judges, he was asking them, you know, how do you select who you nominate? And it was hilarious, the only one that knew anybody who was Chicano was one guy, "Oh, I nominated one, yeah." "Well how do you know him?" "Well he's in my tennis club." "What's his name?" "Pancho Gonzalez, the tennis star." You know, he had nominated him to the--that was the only one, right? But other than that. So, the Biltmore Six case was another famous case, everyone was found not guilty eventually on that case. It went to trial. I was the last one, and, but before I get into that part, give me another question, because it's going to transition into me leaving the country.

Well, one of the other big issues we took on was the war in Vietnam. Because we found out that Dr. Ralph Guzman did a study out of UCLA, and showed that Chicanos had a higher casualty rate in Vietnam due to the fact that we were put in the most dangerous positions, but higher casualty rate, in relation to our population from the Southwest, right? And that again blew our minds. We said wow, so not only are we being drafted and not going to college, we're getting killed in higher numbers.

So, what was popular back then was these antiwar moratoriums. We decided let's do a Chicano moratorium. I remember going to a meeting at the Brown Beret office, and David Sanchez brought up, let's do a Chicano moratorium. Now I do know that, Rosalío

Muñoz will also say that he had meetings, said let's do a Chicano moratorium. So there's going to be a debate who started the idea of, to have a Chicano moratorium, right? But the first one we organized was in December 1969, we marched from Evergreen Park in Boyle Heights to Obregon Park in East LA. And the issue was protesting the high casualty rate of young Chicanos, and the war in Vietnam. And I have a couple of photos, I think as a matter of fact, I don't know if we can transition, there's a couple of photos on the wall there of that march. In December of [19]69.

DC: We'll take a look at those at the end, I think.

CM: Yeah, OK. And it was a couple thousand people, we had a rally, and that was politically creating a lot of awareness for us in the community. Because prior to that, they were trying to stereotype that Chicanos were all pro-war, or Chicanos were pro-military. And we had a long history of being in the military, and there was a book called *Among the Valiant* by a Marine about the Congressional Medal of Honor that Chicanos had won. [1:20:00] So, we said some of that may be true, but in this case, you know, we're saying no. You know, we're saying, we're challenging. So we met a lot of resistance from groups. Veterans groups, community groups. But little by little, we were able to popularize that we were being targeted by the draft, and that we were being put in dangerous front line positions in higher numbers.

DC: And did you get support from other antiwar folks?

CM: Yes. From the antiwar movement we did, and the black movement, yes. So we did the December protest, and then we did a March one, March 1970. And then the big one was August 29, 1970 where people estimate at least 30,000 people marching down Whittier Boulevard, saying "Raza si, Guerra no." In that big march, with the peaceful

rally at Laguna Park, now called Salazar Park, was attacked by the LAPD and the sheriffs. And now we know now that the *La Opinion* reporter, Esai Salvarado [?], three years ago, filed a Freedom of Information on Sal Castro, and he found out that the FBI was working with local police, doing intelligence gathering, even before the walkouts, and before the moratorium. It showed that their concern was that the Chicanos would get together with the blacks and start challenging the movement, the war in Vietnam. So this was--now who was president at that time? OK, you're talking [19]69 now. OK, because Nixon--no, not Nixon. Johnson decided not to run, right? Sixty-eight.

DC: Nixon was elected in [19]68.

CM: So Nixon got elected. So here we are in [19]69 and [19]70, it's already Nixon. So yeah, so it was Nixon, Hoover, FBI. There's tons of files that this reporter got, I don't know if you're interested in that, that showed that the FBI was working with local police, intelligence-gathering. That they knew they were ready; they had full force of LAPD and sheriffs on August 29th. And they provoked an incident, and they attacked a peaceful rally. It was a peaceful rally, they had folklorico dances, they attacked it brutally with tear gas and batons. It created a whole rebellion that day. And that day, Ruben Salazar, who was the youth director for the news station, KMS TV station, was on the ground with a cameraman, covering that whole event. He had also written a series of articles for *LA Times*, critical of police abuse, immigration abuse, Chicano identity, he interviewed me and David, and Ralph, and he wrote about us. And I remember talking to him, and he would say--he would listen to us, sympathetic, but I remember one time he told me, but Carlos, the system works. The system works. He kind of said the system works. I said, no we want a revolution; we want a new system. By that time we were already saying

forget it, you know? We needed a revolution, and we want Chicano power. But he was killed by the sheriffs that day, as well as Lyn Ward and Angel Diaz. But there was a whole rebellion.

So, back up. We didn't find out until *La Opinion* got those files that the sheriff, LAPD, now this is sheriff territory, but they had the LAPD there in full force. In my view, ready to disrupt and attack us, and destroy that antiwar movement. And they did, because they killed Ruben, they disrupted the movement, so by--after that, the movement became defensive. They arrested Corky Gonzalez. They tear gassed the whole neighborhood. Have you ever seen some of those news clippings on that? Or, August 29, [inaudible] 29. But by the end of 1969, I had already been arrested almost a dozen times. Not only the grand jury indictments, but just arrests. You know, harassment arrests for being a Brown Beret, a Brown Beret leader. I was the Minister of Information, I forgot to mention that. You know, for some reason, I was--when I was at the Garfield High School walkouts, [1:25:00] the reporters were running around, trying to interview people, and nobody would interview them. Then they saw me with the beret, and, "We want to interview you, are you one of the leaders?" I go, "No, I'm not a leader." And they said, "Well we want to talk to a leader." I said, "Well I'll talk to you, but you know," so they interviewed me, right? So when I got back to the Brown Beret office, La Piranha Coffeehouse, David confronted me, said, "Well what are you doing interviewing?" "Yeah, well they wanted to do something. We can't just let them not do an interview." Anyway, I was made the Minister of Information after that. I was just--so then I was supposed to speak at the rallies, antiwar rallies, press conferences, so I started being very visible, and getting arrested and harassed. Another major struggle in [19]68, [19]69 was

at East LA College, I was still in La Vida Nueva. I had one foot there and then the other foot in the Brown Berets. We lead a student strike for ethnic studies. Black studies and Chicano studies. And it was La Vida Nueva, Black Student Union. It took days and weeks, but the final day, when we shut down the college, the administration called the sheriffs, and the sheriffs came on campus with a whole line-up of police and beat and arrested people. And disrupted the strike. And then, I went home, got in my car with my family and friends, and they followed me and arrested me. And they accused me of assault and battery on a cop. I went to trial on that. I was also at a rally at a college, I think it was Mount San Antonio College, where I got arrested there. They said I had a gun. I was found not guilty. During the times that I was in jail, the--I got beat up twice. Well, actually, once in the jail and once in the street. LAPD stopped me one time, and provoked me. They handcuffed me, started pushing me around, and I made the mistake of saying hey, well, take the cuffs off. I was like, "All right, take them off, come on." And then they started hitting me, and I go, "Oh shit, they're going to kick the shit out of me," right? Well they did, you know? But I didn't fight back, because the other guy was sitting there with a billy club, ready like this, you know? I had been arrested in the, I think it was, I lost track of which arrest. In the county jail, they took me into a day room and started beating me up. That time, I fought back. I said well, I'm already getting beat up, so I might as well fight back.

But inside the jail, they had gloves, and they didn't have the billy clubs, because they didn't have--yeah, so the other thing I wanted to point out, so I'm getting all these arrests, right? The East LA 13, the assault and battery on the cop, the Biltmore Six case, so I'm getting bailed out, and going to court on all these cases. Right? The first time we go to

court it was the Biltmore Six, well, actually for the arraignment, where they're going to give testimony to see if there's enough evidence to hold us for trial. Not the first one, because the first one, four people got cut loose. They had Fernando Sumaya there as a witness, the undercover cop. OK? So we're in the hall of injustice, we call it the old--the building where the Manson trial took place, where the Sleepy Lagoon case took place. Historic place, right? An old building.

So I go in there. The--I think Gloria was there, I don't know if you talked about that. Gloria was there, and the Brown Beret women were there. Lorraine Escalante was there, other Brown Berets were there, Fernando Sumaya's going to testify. Damn, we've got to be there. I had a little job and I had a briefcase, because my students--. So I walk in with my briefcase, and I sit down. Sergeant Abel Armas who was part of the intelligence group, sits next to me and looks at me. Then he opens up his coat, he had a big giant revolver, and he puts his hand--and he looks at me like that. I go fuck, and I'm looking at him like oh shit. And then Fernando Sumaya's up there, and I go, "What the hell is going on here?" So I'm sitting there, and then I go, "Oh shit, I'd better call my job," seeing as how I'm not going to be there, right? I had a little job. So I go out to the lobby, to the phone booth, and I dial and [was] talking, "Hey, you know what, I've got to be in court. I can't go to work today, I'll be late." And you know, the old fashioned telephone booths? So all of the sudden I hear this noise, and somebody pushing on the door. And it's Abel Armas, big tall Chicano, husky guy, with a couple other suits and sheriffs with him. And they start [1:30:00] pushing, and I'm caught, and I go like this, and I try to like--what's-- and then it's like, anyway, they busted the door. And they pushed my legs open, they busted the door open, they dragged me out. And I'm here on the phone. The guy had

heard what happened, they go--because later on I had him go to court to testify that I had called him. They dragged me out, and check this out. They grab my briefcase, and one of the other cops pulls a gun.

DC: Oh.

CM: And he's going to--about to go like this, but then the Brown Beret women, Andrea and Lorraine, "He's got a gun, he's got a gun!" And he put it back.

DC: Wow.

CM: Yeah, so they arrested me anyway for resisting arrest. But they were trying to plant a gun on me, so they arrested me. And then they took me in the back of the lobby, and oh, and Lorraine Escalante got arrested too, for trying to protect me or help me out. So we're sitting there like this, and Armas and Sumaya come out and started making jokes. Oh you guys, making fun of us. I said look, we're arrested here just take us wherever you've got to take us so we can get bailed out, you know? I don't know whether they thought I was going to try to do something to Sumaya, or they were trying to entrap me, or provoke me, because they had--that was their style, entrapment. Because I mentioned earlier that Sumaya had gotten two of those Airborne guys arrested at a firebombing of a Safeway station. And he was always advocating let's go shoot up the windows. Or people who were criticizing within the Chicano movement, "Oh let's go shoot them up," right?

So anyway, I got arrested for resisting arrest, right, and later on I had to go to court. I had that, the guy that I called, "He called me up and I heard all this loud noise," but I still got convicted, resisting arrest. So the--it was Sergeant Lee Cevallos [?] that told me, Carlos, you're going to be dead, you're going to be killed, or you're going to spend the rest of

your life in jail. So this is what I was going through in [19]69. Right? Arrests, bailout, go in and getting beat up. I couldn't even organize anymore. I talked to Oscar Acosta, I go look, they're after you. I don't know what's going to happen. So, to make a long story short, I said, "I'm out of here, I'm leaving the country. I'm going to go on the lam," as they say in the movies. Or go underground, go underground. So I did. I did.

In January 1970, I left the country with my girlfriend, and wife, Olivia. And we went to live in Mexico. We were trying to get to Cuba, we never got there; we got to Yucatan. And [we] stayed there, working for a year, ended up coming back to Juarez, and lived in Juarez. And I got a job in El Paso, working in a warehouse. And then I got a job as a carpenter apprentice. I was active in the carpenters' union, and then in [19]72, there was a major garment strike; 5,000 Chicanos went out on strike for union recognition at FADA manufacturing plant. It was a major strike. And we got involved in there. We set up worker centers. We started doing labor organizing. But undercover, and immigrant rights organizing, solidarity with Mexico and El Paso. And then also in [19]72, they had the convention of--the El Partido de la Raza Unida party had a big convention. We were there, but we were way up in the bleachers of the El Paso Coliseum. Because we didn't want to go down there, all the folks we knew were there. So we lived underground for seven years, you know, we were involved in--.

DC: How many years?

CM: Pardon me?

DC: How many years?

CM: Seven years, from [19]70 to [19]77, we lived in El Paso. We got--we had a house, I had two children, all under anonymous names, or assumed names. Or what do you call it, anonymous names, or fake names, right?

DC: Yeah.

CM: Yeah, and--.

DC: And when had you gotten married?

CM: Oh, we got married in January [19]70.

DC: OK.

CM: Because the way we did it, we wanted to have like a party to say goodbye to everybody, but we couldn't do that, because then they'd know we were going to jump bail. So we had--let's get married. So we got married in the backyard--no, in the living room with Father Luce, and then we had a party in the back with my ex-wife's cousin had a band. And we had a party, and everybody was there. The Berets, different people, hi, how are you doing. A couple days later, bam, we left the country. We left the country, left for seven years, stayed active, we--during [1:35:00] the FADA strike. It was a national strike for--especially in the right, so-called right to work states; I'd rather call it anti-union state. Yeah, what happened, the New Left sent people to organize. All the different left groups from the new left sent organizers to help. So I got exposed to all the different groups. Are you familiar with the term the New Left?

DC: Yes, yeah.

CM: All right. There's a couple books written on it, I think *The Revolution in the Air*, maybe. Have you read that book?

DC: Yeah.

CM: OK.

CREW: Let me pause for a second.

[break in audio]

DC: OK, so underground through 1977. So come back. [Laughter]

CM: Right, so I lived underground in EL Paso, Texas. I eventually moved to El Paso, Texas. I was a garment worker, a steel worker, a carpenter, organizing. My wife was organizing too, had a workers center. So.

DC: Were you able to keep in touch?

CM: No, no.

DC: Quietly? Not at all?

CM: No, we couldn't be in touch with anybody, because we were paranoid of all the undercover cops, of getting arrested.

DC: So did you have any idea what was happening with the Brown Berets, or?

CM: We would see the news, and keep up with the news. Now Texas, El Paso, doesn't get a lot of good news, it's kind of backwards, in terms of media. So we don't--we wouldn't get everything. But we heard about Ruben Salazar getting killed, and actually that one--when that happened, we were in Mexico City--front page of all the Mexico City newspapers. Ruben had been a correspondent in Mexico City. But anyway, I'm getting off--the major question is that we stayed in El Paso, had a son and daughter, all named--born under assumed names, what's the proper terminology?

DC: That's it, that's right, assumed names.

CM: Assumed. And we were doing fine. We had a good life. I had my truck. I'd go hunting coyotes on the weekends. [Laughter] Had our activism, let's see, [19]77. OK, so

[19]77, it had been seven years. We should be able to go back and visit, and come back. So, we came in May of [19]77, we visited my sister and her husband in the -----, everything was OK a day or two. Then we came to Monterey Park, visited my wife's cousin, it was like a family reunion. And we were going to go out to dinner that night. But the sheriffs--no, excuse me, not the sheriffs, the police raid the house. It was the Monterey Park police, and they had their whole outfits. Bulletproof vests with their rifles, dogs, and LAPD. There was another sergeant, Lee Castroita [?], who was part of the group. And they raided the house, and there was no way to get out, they come in there with guns, put me up against the wall, you're under arrest. I go oh, shit. Like shock, going back. I felt like living in the womb in El Paso, Texas. We were back in my hometown, Juarez, El Paso. So anyway, what started was a two-year battle, justice for Carlos Montes, had a defense committee, community activist group, we fought it for two years, I was found not guilty of all charges.

DC: Now were you out on bail during that time, or were you--.

CM: Yes. No, well after a month I got out on bail. But the cops, the DA and the cops said, don't let him out, he's going to run again. He ran once, he's going to run again. I said no, I won't run. [I] put up my mother-in-law's house as collateral. So I got bailed out. I had a committee, we went to trial in November of [19]79, I was found not guilty, jury trial. It was me and Fernando Sumaya. I was the last one of the Biltmore cases.

DC: Oh, so that was still on the Biltmore charges, that's what that was.

CM: Yeah. That was--yeah, yeah. Oh yeah, yeah, OK, because all the other--yeah, all the other charges were the East LA 13 walkout was thrown out in court as being unconstitutional. That we had a right to protest the school district. The other charges,

you know, I had beat the gun charge, I had the one resisting arrest; it was a small misdemeanor. Oh, the only one they still had me on was assault and battery on a cop at East LA College. That one, they said I had gone to trial, I had been convicted of a felony, and I said no, it was a misdemeanor. It was--they accused me of throwing him a can, yeah, and he wasn't even hurt. But on the Biltmore case, I was found not guilty. But then they wanted me to go back on the East LA College case. I went to that one, and they gave me like, probation. Gave me probation and a \$1,000 fine. I remember saying, "\$1,000 fine?" And they--the attorney said, "Be quiet, man, you ought to be glad you're not in jail." So then, [1:40:00] I went back to--so then it was, by then I was living in LA, and being active in community organizing in LA.

So in the [19]80s, I got a job with United Way. I was an organizer in the community. I went back with CSO, Community Service Organization, I got involved in the Jesse Jackson campaign in [19]84. We got involved in immigrant rights movement, pushing for immigration reform. So the '80s was about rebuilding the family, being back in LA, reestablishing my roots. In the '90s, we got into the antiwar movement, the war in Iraq, we did the twenty-year anniversary of the Chicano moratorium in 1990, we had a big march, 5,000 people. For 1990, that's a big march. And, but ask me some questions.

DC: So you kept at it. And you--how did you support yourself during that?

CM: I got a job, I got a job. I worked full-time. I worked for United Way as an outreach worker. I worked as a job developer for the Mexican American Opportunity Foundation. I tried to get a job with progressive nonprofits, but I was still kind of too hot. Here's Carlos Montes, seven years later coming back, you know? Conspiracy to commit arson, the whole case. And we put on a free political prisoner campaign, you know? We

supported Leonard Peltier, Native Americans who were political prisoners, so we raised the whole issue of free political prisoners. A lot of people wouldn't hire me, because I was still too hot, yeah, too radical. Too militant. And by seven years later, some folks had given up on the movement. What--oh, what I did forget--.

DC: What happened with the Brown Berets?

CM: Well, the repression, the counterintelligence program, the FBI working with local police to infiltrate and disrupt the Black Panthers, the Brown Berets, militant organizations, worked to a certain extent--that many organizations were disrupted and destroyed. People were sent to prison, killed, or jailed, or went underground to Canada and Mexico, like myself. Other folks were coopted by jobs, the War on Poverty program. Other people got into electoral politics, other people got into electoral, excuse me, labor organizing. There was a segment of the movement though that got into the New Left. And not only the white, the black, and Chicanos got into the new left, and started looking at socialism and organizing the working people to continue the struggle. But, the counterintelligence program, the COINTELPRO, was a major disruptive force, the Brown Berets were disrupted, and disbanded in 1972. I was in El Paso, Texas, the Black Panthers were destroyed, as well as other movements. And ask me a question.

DC: OK. So back to, so your working life, and finding it.

CM: Well right--.

DC: Difficult to find employment [inaudible].

CM: Difficult to find employment, even though some of the unions were too afraid of me. I was too radical. So, an old Brown Beret friend of mine, Richard Diaz, who was my buddy, my homeboy, my best buddy, I went to high school with him, we cruised, he's the

one that the police said I could take the billy club. He said hey, come to work for Xerox. He was a sales rep, and I go no, no, I'm not going to work for a corporation. I worked for MAOF, Mexican American Op, as a job developer, finding jobs for ex-offenders. And he kept at it, it took him a year, he finally convinced me, look, you can make good money. You're always out in the field, outside, you don't like to be locked up in an office, and you're talking to people. I can get you in--because he became a manager. So he got me in. I was still finishing probation from the old case, right? So he got me in. It was kind of funny. I was kind of the oddball, because all these young businesspeople from USC, UCLA, and I was this old Chicano guy coming in here. I had a beard, I didn't know how to dress as a suit. One time I walked in wearing a short sleeve shirt, they made fun of me. You don't wear a short sleeve shirt, you've got to wear a long sleeve shirt. No polyester suits, of course. I had to learn that right away. So I became--I learned that it was a lot of fun, because you're out there talking to people--we're selling copiers. So, yeah, I learned how to do it, I started making a little money, had my kids in school, bought a house, so I built my family. My wife got a job.

DC: Meanwhile you had plenty of issues to keep working on.

CM: Yeah, yeah. [1:45:00] We started, continued the issues. We tried electoral politics with the Jackson campaign, [19]84, [19]88. We did the community service organization, and the [19]80s was immigration reform. During the Reagan era, he became president, the immigration reform, Naturalization Act, and then the solidarity movement, Central America, we did a little bit of that with the committee in solidarity with El Salvador. Not heavily involved in it, but supportive of it. And then, there was another thing I mentioned, we did the twenty year anniversary of the Chicano

moratorium. It was a way to rejuvenate the Chicano movement. We had 5,000 people marching. We brought up similar issues: the war in Iraq, the first invasion of Iraq was coming up. We opposed that.

And the '90s, I forget what happened in the '90s. Remind me of some, or ask me a question. Let's see. Raising our children, going to high school. Yeah I was active in CSO, Community Service Organization. So we did, we took, oh yeah, the Nineties, [19]93, [19]94, we formed the Rainbow Coalition for Justice. There was several young Chicanos killed by the sheriff. One was shot in the back, young teenager. They shot him through the back and the bullets came through his mouth; they busted out his teeth, and there was also some blacks killed. So we had the Rainbow Coalition for Justice on the issue of police brutality, [19]93, [19]94. There was a scandal with the LA County sheriffs; they had the Vikings gang within the sheriffs that were doing hits on people. So the big scandal on it--there was a big investigation. So we're part of the issue of police brutality, trying to get reform through the system, and Sacramento.

DC: This is an issue that had been in existence forever.

CM: It's in existence in the '60s; it's in existence today. Today we're still fighting-- Edwin Rodrigo was killed by the sheriffs, shot seventeen times on February the 14th. We're fighting with that case today. So in the '90s we took up the issue of police brutality. Oh yeah, Angel--no, excuse me, not, it was Angel Ortiz here, and then Smokey Jimenez, killed by the LAPD in Ramona Gardens by the sheriff that came out of the jurisdiction East LA, came into city territory. So there was a rebellion there, so we combined those two cases and did the Rainbow Coalition for Justice in the '90s, yeah.

DC: And in the '90s too, there was sort of a youth movement, right? I mean there was--I guess you've probably seen waves of younger people join at certain times.

CM: That's true, that was true. There was young Latino, Chicano youth movements that came through. Identifying more with indigenous culture, and then graduating from college, and raising the issue of affirmative action was always there, college admission, ethnic studies, that was always an ongoing struggle.

DC: Great. So '90s into the 2000s, and we can even jump to where we are right now.

CM: Yeah, the 2000s was a major upsurge in the immigrant rights movement. Due to the effect of NAFTA in [19]94, and of course, the other part was, how can I forget the solidarity with the movement in Mexico, the Zapatista movement, all in the late [19]90s. We went to Mexico--my daughter went to the Zapatista territory, by then my daughter and my son are in their twenties, they're activists on their own. That whole-- the demographics in LA and the Southwest changed dramatically. We have millions of newer immigrants that are displaced from the poverty and violence in Mexico and Central America coming to live in the United States. That creates a whole wave of organizing for immigrant rights. They suffer the issues of police brutality, immigration abuse.

So then in the 2000s, we get into the mega marches. Of--we organized those. I was proud to say I was part of organizing the mega marches in 2006. We were on the ground at 8:00 a.m. with--by that time, I was working with a union, SCIU, I transitioned out of the corporation and I got into--did a career change. By that time I said OK, I'll work for a union, a progressive union, SCIU, the county workers union, I was an organizer. And we were part of a coalition to--for immigration reform. We went to a convention in

[1:50:00] February at the Riverside Convention Center, where united immigrant rights activists from throughout the United States, primarily Chicano. And we said we're going to have big marches in March, against the Sensenbrenner Bill, which was a bill that would criminalize being undocumented in the United States. It had passed in December of 2005. So then we call for massive marches in March of 2006. Chicago has almost half a million people marching on March the 10th.

So when we hear about that, we go wow, we--that means Chicago can do 400, half a million people, we're going to have to up it. So we did it in March 25th though, we needed a little bit more time, right? March 25th, the 25th, that was the 25th, 26th, 27th, that was a Saturday, yeah. Downtown, Olympic and Broadway, we got there at eight o'clock in the morning with a delegation of members from SCIU, healthcare workers, and it was already packed. Olympic and Broadway was bodies, bumper to bumper bodies. We wiggled our way down to Broadway, and looked up Broadway, Broadway was already full. A sea of people from Broadway all the way down to City Hall. We had to take Spring Street to the east of it to be able to walk up. So then, and what we had noticed is hundreds and hundreds, if not thousands of people, had been using the train, the bus, walking, when we were driving to the beginning side--. Families, you could see the whole family, the grandparents, the parents, the kids marching, getting to the starting side. Now that was on March 25th, 2006, the big mega marches, and then on the march--.

DC: Take me into your emotional reaction, having worked in all of these causes for so long, and to see something like that.

CM: Yeah, yeah, it was exhilarating. I mean it takes--always exhilarating, exciting to be in a march. But to see a sea of people and you see the whole LA Civic Center was

inundated with Chicano, newer Mexican immigrants, Central Americans, the whole city was inundated. The freeways were full, the metros were full, the buses were at a standstill. It was like it was a major takeover downtown civic center, that the police weren't even ready for. If we had taken on a rebellion, it would have been a rebellion, but it was a march. And the demand was stop the criminalization of immigrants, which we won. The bill was withdrawn, or--and the, on Monday, March the 27th, the students walked out. Forty thousand students, according to the media, walked out all over the state of California. And marched on city halls. So, Monday morning, we were at the union office. We got the call, let's go down and help the students, right? I was able to get on the radio station with that number one Spanish language station, Piolin, because what happened, how did it happen? They were talking about it, and then oh yeah, in early March, the movie, the HBO movie had come out on the walkouts. There you go, that's why I'm bringing this all up. The original walkouts, it took them years to come up with a movie. HBO movie finally produced them; it came out in early March. So it became very popular, even though it was on HBO, it was, within the Chicano community, everybody's watching the movie. "Walkout, walkout, walkout." So I have a strong position that that helped the walkouts of the students in 2006.

DC: You're portrayed in the movie, right?

CM: And I'm portrayed in the movie, that's true. And so, what happened [was] I called the radio station, I said, "Look, the students are walking out, you know, the movie," and then, "who are you?" "Well, I'm Carlos Montes, I'm in the *Walkout*, you know?" "Oh, you're that guy? Yeah, yeah." And he goes, "Can you put us in touch with El Pachuco, or James Edward Olmos?" I go, "Yeah, well I'll call the producer of

the movie, Moctesuma Esparza, and he can get a hold of him.” He wanted to put us on the air live. I said, “OK, so I’m going to call Moctesuma,” he called James Edward Olmos, and then we called in the station, they interviewed us. Monday morning, the 27th, during the student walkouts of--throughout the whole state. I call for continued walkouts. They asked us, they asked each one of us, what do you think? Edward Olmos goes, “Oh, they made their point, they should go back to school.” I said, “Come on, man.” And then Moctesuma was a little bit like, “Well, you know, it’s a good history, you know,” and I was saying, “Walkout! Walkout!” [1:55:00] I’m kept, since I was on the radio, I kept telling everybody in Spanish, huelga, huelga, salgan a las huelgas. And then--so that was great. Now to us, it was exhilarating having the students use that tactic that we used back in [19]68. But Saturday, on the 25th, to see that massive rally, the whole city hall was surrounded. Have you seen some of those pictures? You see the whole sea of people up and down Broadway, First Street, and even Spring. We barely were able to walk up Spring. And then--.

DC: [Inaudible.]

CM: Yeah, yeah, that was--and then there was marches all up and down, all over the country that started. And then we did a Mayday. Mayday we took two mega marches. One downtown and one down on Wilshire. Massive. Massive. So to us, it’s saying the movement is back, and the newer immigrants that have come to the community are building the movement. They’re--the newer immigrants, the adults that are coming, they have the identity culture as being Mexican, Central American, but their children are being part of the Chicano experience, being bilingual, seeing the racism, the crowded schools, the police brutality, what I went through.

DC: Sure.

CM: And that helped create a whole student movement, La Vida Nueva, United Mexican American Students, because MEChA, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, MEChA's all over the colleges. All over the US. Immigrant rights organizations all over the US, that still exist today, that are still fighting for immigration reform.

DC: Do you have--I'm sorry.

CM: No, I was going to say, and every May Day we go out and march. We did a Mayday march and rally in Boyle Heights, the Community Service Organization, which I organize with, with the Boyle Heights Neighborhood Council. We did a May Day march in Boyle Heights. From 2006 to, let's see, [20]14, we kept doing the big mega marches downtown. Of course they got smaller and smaller, we weren't able to keep up, you know, the mega marches, right?

DC: Right.

CM: So now we do them in Boyle Heights. And what--the other thing is that the 2000 period, there was a second invasion of Iraq, right? So, we continued that--we formed a group called Latinos Contra la Guerra where we got families and students involved in opposition to the war in Iraq. We marched down Whittier Boulevard in 2003. I think it's important to point that out, we took the same route from Belvedere Park to Salazar Park, and held a march and rally.

DC: The same route as the moratorium?

CM: Yes.

DC: Yeah.

CM: Yes, but on the issue of the second invasion of Iraq, in *Latinos Contra la Guerra* and then, what we did though, we integrated the local issues, we want schools, not a war. We want education, not war. So that was the other part of the 2000s, besides immigration. The war issues and taking on international issues, solidarity with Mexico, solidarity with struggles in Colombia, the Plan Colombia. We tried to fight the whole epidemic of the crack and cocaine invasion. But we saw the link of Plan Colombia, that the Clinton administration was pumping a billion dollars into the Colombian government military, against really its own people. But I'm kind of going off a little bit. Ask me a question, so I can bring it back.

DC: No, I was going to ask you, you're--obviously I mean your activism, you continued your activism, but I was going to ask you if the harassment against you also continued.

CM: Right. Well, you know what? Due to my solidarity, I'm glad you asked that question. [Laughter] Because due to my--I've been to Colombia twice, right? I have friends that are active in the antiwar movement, through an organization called the Antiwar Committee, Fight Back News, Colombia Action Network, Palestine Solidarity Organization. And what we do, we do trips to Palestine, Colombia, and Mexico, and we come back and we educate people what we've seen. We denounce what I consider human rights violations that are perpetrated or supported by funding from Plan Colombia, especially in Colombia.

I met with the Coca-Cola workers in Colombia who were trying to organize a union and they're being kidnapped and assassinated. Afrocolombianos who are being displaced from their land. Human rights activists that are being killed [2:00:00] in Colombia. So,

when I came back to the US, I did a speaking tour to denounce Plan Colombia, the US government role in supporting the Uribe repressive government of Alvaro Uribe, and the military apparatus of spying on its own people, using the money to give rewards to the military for what they called, I forget the Spanish word, but false killings. They would kidnap people, peasants, and then dress them in guerilla outfits, and they would kill them to bring up their numbers, and get rewards. That was all documented. But some of my activist friends had been to Palestine, so this network of activists, through Fight Back News, Palestine Solidarity Group, Colombia Action Network, and the Antiwar Committee, and also the Freedom Road Socialist Organization, we were raided.

Now let me make sure I get the year right, 2010; twenty-three people, twenty-two people were raided, 2010, from Chicago, to Minneapolis, to one guy in San Jose, by the FBI. They were raided, but they weren't arrested. It was called the--they were raided by the FBI, and what they did is that they had warrants to search their phones or computers, and all their files. Right? And the issue, the warrant, was looking for--it's a long warrant, but the main part was investigation for providing material support to the PFLP, and the FARC. PFLP, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Palestinian group. And then the FARC is Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia right? Nobody was arrested, but they took all their files.

In one case, Joe and Stephanie Iosbaker, they were there like, all day long taking out boxes, boxes. Hatem Abudayyeh, a Palestinian American activist in Chicago, [they] raided his house. Mick Kelly, Jess Sundin. So, what we did, we started the Stop the FBI Committee, and we fought back, right? That was--. And say, this is harassment. Our theme or slogan was "Solidarity is not a crime." We're antiwar activists, we're in

solidarity with Palestine and Colombia, but there's no proof, and you would have arrested us if there was any proof providing material support. And what does material support mean to them, you know? So no one was arrested, just investigation. Ongoing investigation, ongoing investigation. We go to marches, demos, we formed the--now in my case, 2011, in May, my house was raided by the sheriff's SWAT team and the FBI, on similar allegations of providing material support to the FARC and the PFLP. Now the excuse they used to raid my house and arrest me is that I had a felony conviction from 1969, from the student strike for Chicano studies at East LA College, right? So that was part of the probable cause. Because I had purchased guns legally through the--at the local hardware, not hardware store, sporting goods store.

So I did have guns, but they were registered guns. But they used that as an excuse, saying you're a felon from [19]69, you can't have these guns. So they arrested me, and I had to go to trial, but what they did actually, they broke down the house at five o'clock in the morning. There was literally the sheriff's SWAT team. I was in bed asleep, in the back bedroom. All I heard was a loud crash. I jumped out of bed, yelling, "Who is it, who is it?" All I see [are] these lights with these little rifles, not little rifles, rifles with the little lights on top. And the helmets, and the bulletproof vests. Then, I jumped out of bed, I was like, "Who is it?" "Police, police, Carlos Montes," like oh shit, what the hell's going on, I said. It was shocking. They arrested me. I was in jail for a few days. My family bailed me out. We formed a committee, Free Carlos Montes Committee, part of the Fight Back News, part of the Stop FBI Coalition. And [2:05:00] after a year, I was found not guilty. I--well, hang on. Back that, back that. The--when I went to court, the charges started getting dropped. I had six felonies against me. I forget what they all

were. Felon with a gun, or buying guns, so they started dropping some of the charges, I had three left. So, we went to court, and we did a full campaign, call the DA's office, petitions, every time we would go to court. We would pack the courtroom, drop the charges, we did petitions to Obama, take Eric Holder, because we know it was linked to the investigation into our antiwar activities. What we finally did is did a campaign of the local DA by calling--.

DC: They had taken your files too, right?

CM: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, they took my files, photographs, computers, cell phones, all the memory cards and everything. And we had a defense committee--offense committee. So, we packed the courtroom, we jammed the district attorney's office by calling his phone, [saying] drop the charges, drop the charges. Finally, they said OK; they got tired of it. They go, "What do you want, what do you want?" "Well, drop the charges." "Oh no, we're not going to drop the charges." They wanted me to do time in jail. Like plead guilty to something and we'll drop the charges, do a year or two, I said no, I'm not going to do no jail. So we went back and forth, went back and forth. Finally they said, "Look, we'll drop everything, plead to something." And they still wanted me to do jail, and I said, "No, no, I'm not." I told my attorney, "Let's go to trial. Let's go to trial." But they said, "Look, you go to trial, you could win, you could lose, you never know. No guarantees."

So in the end they said, "OK, look, plead to something, we'll give you probation." They wanted five years' probation. I'm like no, that's too long. Something's going to happen. They said OK, three years probation. So, I pleaded guilty to one count, I forget what the heck it was. We kept debating whether it was a felony or a misdemeanor, you know, they

had evidence that it was a felony; we had evidence that it was a misdemeanor. I pleaded guilty to buying a gun, I think, as a--that I should have told, that I should have said I had been a felon in 1969, knowing--. So I went to court, and then they gave me three years probation, they dropped all the charges, and I was able to go back to organizing. About a year and a half, two years later, I went back to court and filed a motion to have that dropped. The DA objected to it, jumped all over, "No, no, *-*you said three years." I said, "No, I never said, that's what you said, three years."

So the judge agreed, in the interest of justice, I don't think why this should go forward. He dropped the probation, and expunged the record for that charge. Yeah. I continue organizing today with Community Service Organization, we primarily work on immigrant rights. Our last campaign was to fight for deferred action for DAPA, Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and DACA, Deferred Action for Children Arrivals. We had a campaign to write and call the Supreme Court, but unfortunately we lost. Just a temporary setback. The Supreme Court was deadlocked four to four. They couldn't rule on whether Obama had the authority to do an executive order on deferred action.

So, we continue organizing the community. What we did over the years is we fought against the car impounds for folks that are--don't have a driver's license, we fought for the driver's license. We were able to get a California driver's license bill for undocumented--that passed. We were also able to stop the car checkpoints, or checkpoints where they stop people to see if they have a license and they impound their car. So we worked on bread and butter issues that affect the community. But on the ongoing struggle to fight for legalization for all. That's part of our struggle in the Chicano movement for self-determination and for equality. It's not just an immigrant

rights struggle. I see it as part of our ongoing struggle for equality, and part of our ongoing struggle against repression that we lived through all these years. Our history of the Chicano power movement, of today, we have many examples of fighting against repression, whether it's political repression or police repression against our community. We're also working with Edwin Rodriguez's family this year, who was killed by the sheriffs, he was shot seventeen times on February [2:10:00] the 14th. Ten [bullets] through the back, under the false pretense that it was a stolen car; it was not a stolen car, then they said we stopped him because his lights on his license plate wasn't on, just a pretext to harass him. And then also, we're waiting for, excuse me, working with the family of Jose Mendez, a sixteen year old that was killed by the LAPD on February the 6th. Which was a week right before Edwin Rodriguez. So, these are immigrant families that have come to live in the United States, and then their children grow up in East LA, and they're young men, face the same police harassment that I faced growing up, except they're getting killed and harassed. So, we fight for the issue of police--to stop the police killings, as part of the struggle for equality and immigrant rights.

DC: So the struggle continues.

CM: The struggle continues, it's a long, hard struggle, we have a lot of examples of resistance in our--if you look at the history of Chicanos from sort of 1848, the Mexican American War, to today, every decade there's examples of resistance. And I'm glad that I'm part of the, not only the '60s, but even today fighting for justice and equality for Chicanos and Chicanas.

DC: So when you hear about, when people use the, and this is going to be my last question, but--.

CM: Sure.

DC: --when people use the phrase Civil Rights Movement, where do you fit in, in that? What do you think, how do you think about it?

CM: Well we're part of that movement, but as I said earlier, we're part of the whole Civil Rights Movement, but I think it's just a notch higher, or a step forward that it's part of the struggle for equality, to be free. We want to be free, you know? The blacks in the civil rights movement, they wanted their civil rights, be able to vote, get a job, housing, education. But, really the struggle is to be free. Free as a people. And we're not free. You know? We're not free as a people. We're not free as working people. So the struggle continues.

DC: Well said.

CM: Is that enough? Is that enough? Or do you have another question?

Crew: So next week, or two weeks from now, somebody comes--this is a hypothetical. Somebody says, "Carlos, 1968, fifty years later, 2018's the fiftieth anniversary of the Poor People's Campaign. We want you to organize here, and try and recreate those circumstances. Could you do it, or is there a strategy that you would employ to do that? And are the issues the same now as they were then?"

CM: The issues are similar. You know, but conditions have changed, you know? But you know, working people are still suffering a recession. There's high unemployment, or underemployment, low wages. Especially among young people. You know, many people that have jobs, or that are retired, or that have stable jobs, don't see it. But you know, homelessness, you know, in major cities, and unemployment, underemployment, even students that have gone to college have a high student debt, right? So the conditions

are, you know, different demographics, we have a higher population of newer immigrants that have come in the last twenty years, especially from Mexico and Central America, from all over the world, actually. So, if somebody were to ask me to organize a Poor People's Campaign I'd say, you know, we've had newer examples, we had the Occupy movement, we had the immigrant rights mega movements, we had the Bernie Sanders movement, you know, there's different tactics and different strategies that can be used. In the poor people's movement, right here in LA, we have a vibrant, strong homeless movement, advocates, that different organizations, and we also have the Black Lives Matter movement. You know, so where back in the [19]90s, we had the Rainbow Coalition for Justice of blacks and Chicanos uniting together. So, I would say that there's organizations doing that work now. And we would do a fifty year anniversary of the walkouts, or the Brown Berets is coming next year, right? So [19]68, you're right, 2000, it's coming around, all these fifty year anniversaries, you know. But what I ask people, don't just commemorate the anniversary, link it to the struggles of today. Make sure that they're commemorating the struggle of fifty years ago, and the struggle that's going on today. And that we've got to be involved in that struggle, and work with the young people, the new young generation, train them and support them as leaders, as organizers.

CREW: That's nice.

CM: Was that good enough, or what?

DC: That was great.

CREW: No, it was really sweet. Can I ask just one little technical question? Did you ever get your files [2:15:00] back?

CM: Yes. Yes, eventually, once I beat the case, and everything was done, I got my files back. We know they copied everything, of course. I got my archives back. Because yeah, they went through the whole--this whole place was thrown--photo albums, this whole closet over here, the back, the bed was thrown over, yeah, yeah, I got my files back, and the, yeah, I got them. [Laughter] I donated some of them to the Cal State LA library archives. And one big thing I forgot to mention. Damn, how can I forget that? Well, so part of the FBI harassment, as I mentioned, because of our solidarity work. But the other big part is that we really got on their radar when we organized the march on the Republican National Convention, 2008, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Where we have a strong base of activists, the Antiwar Committee, the Fight Back News. We marched on the RNC, and I was there, and we were there for several days, marching, protesting, sitting down in the street, and we did it again, so that's when we got on their radar. And they sent an FBI infiltrator to the Antiwar Committee by the name of Karen Sullivan, who works for the FBI. I don't know where she's at now, but she infiltrated the Antiwar Committee, infiltrated Fight Back News, infiltrated Freedom Row Socialist Organization. And then during the raids, when we were trying to find out where everybody was, we kept calling her, and they called back, saying, "Don't bother calling her, she's one of us." Meaning one of the FBI. And then again in 2012, we marched at Tampa Florida, at the RNC against Romney, and our slogan was, "Money for human needs, not for war." Stop the warmongers. McCain in 2008, and then Romney in 2012. I'm not going to be there, but we're doing another march in Cincinnati in July. July 18th, 19th, we're calling it March on the RNC. The same slogan. "Money for human needs, not for war." This time we're adding, "Dump Trump." At the CSO locally, we had a lot of protests against

Trump. We went to the Simi Valley Reagan Presidential Library, when they had the candidates' debate, we were outside protesting. "Dump Trump, Stop the Racist Republican Agenda." That's a good way to end it. [Laughter] All right, all right, all right. Oh, there's so much to go on, right. So much to go on.

DC: Let's stop there, let me just say thank you.

CM: Yeah, yeah. No, thank you.

DC: This was wonderful, and we really appreciate all the work that you've done, and your time.

CM: Thank you. No, absolutely, you know, I'm glad that you're doing this project to document the movement, and to carry on the struggle, so that other generations can learn from it, and continue the struggle. Yeah. All right, all right.

Female 1: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress, and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

END OF INTERVIEW