Q: I’m here with Martha Cotera in her Austin, Texas home. Today is October 25, 2017. And we are starting the interview. So Martha, could you tell me a little bit about yourself, some background information on you?

A: Sure. I was born in 1938, in Nuevo Casa Grandes, Chihuahua. My grandmother is from the Old Town, Paquimé, which is the old -- the Anasazi name for the town, which is Casa Grandes. And there’s a Casa Grandes, Arizona, Casa Grandes, New Mexico, and Casa Grandes, Chihuahua. So I don’t know our direct line, but I do know that my grandmother was indigenous to the area of that community. So I grew up with very strong roots in Native American culture, and very interesting history in terms of the Mexican Revolution, and talking to my grandparents about what brought it on, social justice issues, et cetera. So I grew up with a very strong background in social change, political change, the need to -- my grandfather used to say -- to always be in revolution. To always be looking to improve your community, yourself, et cetera. I was very lucky to be very, very close to them. We immigrated to El Paso when I was nine years old, and I’ll never forget the conversation with my grandfather, because I grew up
thinking that Anglos were, like, the devil because of the things that had happened in 1848, when his family had had to leave Marathon, Texas area and go back to Zacatecas. That’s another story. And so he would say that -- not to worry, for me as an immigrant. That as long as I moved within these continents, American continents, that we were home. I mean, that this is our indigenous land, and that we were not immigrants anywhere. That we were just migrating from one place to the other. That we were not entering anybody’s -- others’ territory.

That really helped me develop a perspective on myself as an “immigrant,” quote, to a different community. So he made me feel like I was just migrating to a different community, but not necessarily immigrating to a different political situation or condition, place. That was very important.

Anyway, I noticed that one of the questions was -- or concerns was, was I an activist before? I came to Austin in 1963, and I came to Austin from El Paso after graduating from college and getting married. I graduated from UTEP, University of Texas at El Paso -- at that time, it was known as Texas Western College -- with a BA in English, Southwestern literature, and Spanish literature and history. So I have a very strong background in literature
and history. I got married to Juan Cortera, also a native from El Paso and Juarez, Mexico. He was a student at the school of architecture here in Austin, so we came to Austin in ’63, in August of 1963. Prior to that, I had been an activist in — elementary school, not so much, but in high school, because I suffered a great deal of discrimination when I got to high school. The discrimination in high school was addressed both on class and race issues. So there was a discrimination of class, as we were all assumed to be, quote, “lower-class,” and we were discriminated — the children that showed indications of being lower-class were totally pushed out.

You know, pushed out, and teachers would brag — the poorest students came from Smeltertown, which is right outside of El Paso, families that worked in the refinery. So there were working-class children. The teachers, I remember — I was a teacher aide in the lounge one time. I heard them brag about the fact that, out of all the Smeltertown kids, by the time we were seniors, that only three remained. And that just hurt me so badly. And those three were so up there that all three of them were top-10-percent graduates. So was I. But one of them, Ramona Valenzuela, was valedictorian. That’s how amazing they were. And so I
learned a lesson. I had been an activist. I was editor of the school paper, and almost got expelled for endorsing Adlai Stevenson against Eisenhower, because I learned from my mother that it would be horrible if the Republicans took over. Because up to that point, it had been Democrats under FDR, Truman, and very liberal, liberal administrations. And here come the Republicans, and so we actually did an endorsement in the paper. I got talked into it by my co-editor, Tissie Goodell. And we almost got expelled for doing that. But also, along with Tissie, I learned a lot about advocacy in high school for students that were being discriminated against, including myself.

I had to start with myself, because I suffered a great deal of discrimination. And even as a senior graduating, I got a one-year scholarship, PTA scholarship, and I was talked into giving it up, because -- it’s so stupid. My journalism -- no, my business teacher said that I was never going to be able to go through college, because it was too expensive and I couldn’t afford it, and why didn’t I give up the scholarship to a male Anglo student who would be able to finish? And stupid me, I thought, well, she’s probably right. And then I went and told my mentor at the public library, Elizabeth Kelly, what had happened, and she
was so angry. And so she got me a four-year scholarship, including books, tuition and books, for four years, from the International Altrusa Club. It’s a women’s club in El Paso. So I was very, very lucky, and, in a way, my bad decision turned into a better break for me. So that’s how I went through the university with a four-year tuition and book scholarship. I was an activist. I worked with the Viva Kennedy Clubs, because by that time, by the late ’50s, for the 1960 election, we were getting to vote for a very good candidate. We were getting to vote for a very liberal candidate, I felt, John Kennedy. And so we started Viva Kennedy Clubs. We were in the midst of that, and we worked on that, and then we -- of course, he got elected.

In ’62, I graduated, and I had worked for five years, full-time, at the El Paso Public Library. But actually, I had been working since I was 12, retail, in a retail store, downtown El Paso. Then when I graduated from high school, I went to work full-time at the public library with my mentor, Elizabeth Kelly. I worked there full-time until I graduated from college in ’62. Then in ’63, a year later, I got married and would move to Austin. So when I came to Austin, I was pretty much politically involved, but not radical. Here is where I became radicalized. Because in
El Paso, it was -- a lot of the discrimination was race, but because we were the majority, they didn’t get very far. I mean, we had a lot of power, as we were the majority. Mexican Americans in El Paso were the majority. And so we could always overcome. Economically, we had a lot of power. Politically, we had, you know, not so much, but socially we had a lot of power. We had a lot of capital, social capital. And as a majority population, we could pretty much -- we didn’t have any things like housing discrimination. The schools -- yes, as always, the schools in the poorer -- it was more of a class discrimination situation there than race.

The poorer schools, as in every place in this country, got the worst deals. But I got some really wonderful lessons in social justice from my mom, for example. We were not -- my mother had married, but then, within six months, she was widowed. Her husband died of a heart attack, and she was widowed. So she had to get whatever job, minimum-wage job, she could get to survive. So we were not doing nearly as well as our grandparents were back in Mexico, and that happens a lot. Sometimes your family back in Mexico is actually better off than you are, economically and socially. They have better standing, better position. So
we had never really -- oh, well the lesson I learned from my mom is that -- the school at one point was having a school drive for used books, children to bring the books they no longer wanted, to be donated to the school library. It was Douglass School, was a school for African American kids. I mean, we only probably had two African American families, and they had a school for African American kids. You know, separate school. So when I told my mom -- and like I said, my mom was struggling -- but when I told my mom that we should gather up the books that we no longer wanted so we could take them for donating, my mother was totally, totally incensed.

I mean, she was so angry, and she said, “No, ma’am, you’re not taking used books.” She said, “I just can’t understand. Your school doesn’t get used books for the library. Why are they doing a book drive for used books for the African American kids?” You know, “Porque? No es gusto.” She said, “No. You’re going to go out there, and we’re going to buy new books, and you’re going to donate your books to be donated to the school.” And that made such an impression on me. She was so generous with the very little resources that we had. That taught me that, very often, the people that have the least -- and I’ve
learned that lesson in Austin over and over and over again -- are the most generous. I think because, basically, there’s a lot of understanding that goes with the necessity of struggle for everything you have, every bobby pin, every safety pin. But that instead of making people bitter and possessive, it makes them, to me, more generous. I would love, someday in the future, to kind of study that. I had a lesson of that here in Austin once, when I was trying to raise funds to help this newly divorced immigrant woman whose husband had abused her and then divorced her, and then never legalized her. How often that happens. Never documented her, although he was a US citizen.

Then he always threatened to, if she left him after his abuse, that he would take the children away. So she finally got away, and I was called in to help interpret in her court case. And so I started to raise money for her so that she would look -- because he threw her out without clothes or anything, none of her clothes. So to get money for clothes and to get money for furniture, start up an apartment, et cetera. I learned a hard lesson. I went to people that were very resourceful here, and they offered nothing. And I’m not going to tell a story about [Teresa Long?] because it would not be a nice story, but I had an
unfortunate situation with that. I learned that very wealthy people are sometimes the least charitable to those in need. They are very charitable to institutions that will be a legacy for them, that will put their name on buildings and everything, but not charitable one-on-one. To me -- Jesus Christ. I mean, literally, literally, what lesson is there? That was a very harsh lesson here in Austin, that all of her friends that were in the same straits as she was -- house cleaning, and this and that and the other -- were the ones that put the furniture and everything together.

Pam Reed, to her credit, Commissioner Pam Reed had a clothing store, and of all the people with means that I reached out to, she was one that donated clothes, new clothes, for Virginia to go to court in great-looking outfits, so that she would feel good about herself. Anyway, here I sidetrack. But I was an activist before I came to Austin. But when I came to Austin, I became a radical activist. I would say I was politically involved and moderately activist when I was in El Paso, but when I came to Austin -- and it really hurt me on a personal level, because the very first attempt that we made to rent a house that wouldn't rent houses to us because we were
Mexican. They would rent to us if we said that we were foreign students, but not Mexican American. You know? And it just killed me. I mean, it just killed me, because as a matter of fact, my husband had been raised in a very privileged, wealthy situation in Mexico, but that did not make a difference. The fact is that if people discriminate against one of you, they discriminate against all of you. They have discriminated against you, regardless of your situation, and you cannot say, well, I’m not part of that race or class system. So that made me an activist of another sort. That made me an activist on race issues.

You know, the fact that I realized that Mexican American community in Austin was 10 percent of the population. The African American community was 16 percent. I did the numbers. I was very good at demography. I had been a librarian in public documents for five years, so I was very experienced in demographic research. The first thing I did in Austin, once I suffered that horrible -- I had brought with me a book that was called A Social Survey of Austin that was done in 1910 -- about 1910, I think. It’s an amazing book about -- the way it addresses the Mexican American community in Austin, and the way it discriminates against -- the description of the Mexican American
community in Austin. The research that I did coming into Austin -- before I came to Austin and realized that the Mexican part of Austin, Mexican sectors in Austin, had school achievement levels of second grade, and of course, other parts of Austin had 16-plus, because it’s always been that way in Austin. That academics has always been -- education gap has always been amazing. Income gaps were amazing. And they haven’t closed. That’s the awful thing, that despite all the effort of 54 years -- maybe it would be worse if we hadn’t acted out in 54 years I’ve been here.

But I came armed with these statistics, and I was really -- and then when -- I had these statistics, but I didn’t realize, on a personal level, what it meant to me until I started looking for a house, and I was told over and over and over again that they could not rent housing to me in the university area because I was Mexican American. When I interviewed in the public schools and they said they could not hire me because I had the wrong attitudes about Mexican Americans, and I said, well -- and I thought to myself when I was being interviewed and told this, I thought, well, did I not show enough empathy or knowledge or competency or what? And the person that interviewed me was a vice principal of the university junior high at that time --
that’s where I was interviewing -- said, “No, because you think that these children can learn, and anybody that thinks that these children can learn is not doing them any favor, because they can’t learn.” And I thought, geez, I really don’t want to teach there in this school district. I want to get in there, and I want to reform the school district, and I want to change those attitudes. And so from the day that my husband and I came, and before we even had our first child, we started working on school reform, because of that horrible interview. So I very, very quickly -- and of course I got to -- immediately, within months, I knew the African American community, and I met the leadership of the Austin Hispanic community, and I started working.

I mean, I started working really, really hard. Within the first year, we were actually -- my husband and I -- helping with the first city council race that we encountered, and that was B.T. Bonner, an African American, running very -- you know, very, very radical, but very wonderful man running for city council. And we ran candidates every year, every year since I’ve been here. Never have failed to run minority candidates. So it wasn’t like the minority community wasn’t trying. And we were only 26 percent of
the vote total, potentially, but we did it anyway, because I always felt that every race -- and you know this, Dalia, I have to address you, because you’ve been involved with the campaign leadership training, and because you know politics. Every race is not a wasted race, whether you win or lose, because every race trains people on the political system. I felt that way. I felt that it was -- I never feel that a vote is wasted, that efforts are wasted, ever, because every race is a learning situation. And so my focus -- and our focus, Juan’s and mine -- and I have to say that my husband, Juan, had already been at UT for a couple of years before we got married, and that he also -- he had been in the military, the Air Force, so he knew the race dynamics in ways that I did not know it.

I knew about class in El Paso, but I didn’t know about race. So he was a race activist before we got married. He had been involved as a student before we got married -- he had already been at UT for two years -- in integrating the Texas Theater and integrating the -- there was a five-and-ten-cent store downtown, and other places downtown. He had been involved in that movement to integrate. But this was a black-and-white binary. I mean, it was a binary kind of situation. But nevertheless, he was very much involved in
that system. He just laughed when I -- because I could not believe him. When he would tell me about these things about Austin, I could not believe it. But when I encountered them myself, as we were newly married, he just laughed. I mean, he laughed, and he would say, “Well, you know, you got your work cut out for you, I guess.” And so we continued to do that. So those -- that is a way I became an activist on race issues. As far as that was concerned, a lot of the movements I described to you that I have been involved with throughout all my life in Austin on race issues, we were involved in team -- very early on in the ’60s, we were involved in political campaigns from the beginning. From the beginning.

We joined PASSO, Political Association of the Spanish-Speaking, which was very active -- well, it was Political -- como? Political Association -- something like that, and then it had -- oh, “Organization” I think was at the end. But anyway, so we joined PASSO, which was a Hispanic political organization. We worked with the African American community on politics. Then we established a local chapter of TEAM, Texans for Education Advancement of Mexican Americans, and through TEAM, we did educational reform locally. But before that, Juan and I -- actually,
before our daughter was born -- we started working on AISD issues, because of my experience having interviewed, and knowing what the attitudes were. So we worked on TEAM. We worked for many, many years on TEAM, both at the local level and at the statewide level on educational reform, and out of TEAM was instituted an organization still known -- an excellent organization known as IDRA. I think it’s called Intercultural Research -- Intercultural Education Development and Research Association, I believe. It’s in San Antonio. But that came out of TEAM. Dr. Jose. My goodness. We’ve got his archives here at the university. Anyway. So out of that, we developed TEAM, local and statewide, and I became very active in that. We also, in the early ’60s, then, after the Civil Rights Acts were passed by Johnson, after all that civil rights legislation -- you can have a federal law, but you have to have local ordinances that reflect that law. So we made sure that, as a result of that, we instituted bilingual education, we instituted Title I education, Title VII, Title -- all the titles that were encompassed in the Civil Rights Act, both on race and gender issues, we made sure that they were instituted in Austin. Because activists had to take that federal law and implement it in the city. Otherwise --
that’s why a lot of cities have laws in the South against race, but people still are racist, because those laws, you never have local ordinances to make those laws a reality. I became an expert on local policy and legislation, and making sure that the districts adopted these programs and these policies that the federal government allowed and demanded and then mandated, and that the city also did housing ordinance. I was so happy with the civil rights addressing public transportation and housing issues, that we could have a local housing ordinance. So we worked on that. We did that.

Policy -- if you’re not involved in policy, then you’re not involved. I mean, you have to follow up, organizing with policy. And that’s what I love about the Workers Defense Project, because the Workers Defense Project, they advocate and they’re activists, but then they get to city council and they say, “You’ve got to have these policies mandated. You’ve got to look out for security, safety of workers. You’ve got to make sure” -- yesterday, this person that works with me as a personal assistant on Tuesdays was telling me that she got a check that Workers Defense got for her because some employer tried to cheat her out of her money, because she’s undocumented. Workers Defense
implements policies and goes after people legally, and that’s what you have to do as an activist. You can’t just like, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, protest. You’ve got to follow it up with policy initiatives, and you’ve got to learn policy, and you’ve got to get involved in political campaigns. Along with getting involved with political campaigns, I’ve also, all my life, been involved in instituting policies and working with policies, and making sure that we have policies in place that follow. I was involved in writing the first sanctuary resolutions for the city of Austin, very early on, late ’70s -- in the ’70s. We’ve had them reenacted in the ’70s, ’80s, ’90s.

So I worked with TEAMA, and then I worked very closely, from the very beginning, with the Democratic Party. But the Democratic Party, on race issues, on making sure that the party adhered to policies and had policies that were inclusive of race, and empowered people, the party itself, of different races -- the problem with the Democratic Party is that it was one party, but it had within it -- about 30 percent of the party, Democratic Party, were Democrats, real Democrats. Out of that, maybe 20 percent were liberal. Thirty percent were Democrats, 70 percent were Republicans, in the party. Because it was a Southern
Democratic Party, that had grown up opposed to abolition. It’s very complicated, and I hope that you study political science, because it’s very complicated. Because the Republican Party, liberal Republican Party, moderate in the Northeast, was an abolitionist party, in the Midwest and Northeast, the ones that called for the Civil War. The Southern Democrats -- the Democrats controlled the South. It’s very different from what it is today. But the Southern Democratic Party was pro-slavery. And so that, then, after Reconstruction, became -- well, until Raza Unida, in Texas, you had a Democratic Party that was actually what the Republican Party is today.

Forget about the old Republican Party of the Midwest and Northeast. That was a liberal party that called for abolition, and things [Spanish]. And so it was very horrible for us as activists, and social justice activists and race activists, to be in a party in which a very tiny minority, maybe 20 percent, were liberal, 30 percent were Democrat in values and culture, and 70 percent were Republican, like the Republicans today. White supremacists. To tell you, John Connally was in there. He was a Republican. Perry -- Perry -- was a Democrat. Phil Gramm was a Democrat. Dick Armey, Tom DeLay -- all the
most awful Republicans in the state were in the Democratic Party. So we were not -- when we were looking for a way out as minority activists, as Latino -- as Mexican American activists, on race issues, we were looking for a way out. We were looking for a way out of a Democratic Party that was, in fact, a Republican Party with a very tiny minority of Democrats in it, and an even tinier minority of liberal Democrats. So you had liberal Democrats, you had moderate Democrats, some conservative Democrats, and then 70 percent Republicans. So it wasn’t a Democratic party. We left.

We were involved in Democratic Party, but even -- from the very beginning, and in El Paso -- but even in the beginning, even the liberal Democrats were extremely -- like they are today -- extremely closed to change, and extremely closed to being inclusive and to sharing the power. And so, if you were there, you didn’t get involved in learning about party structure or anything. All you did was you were handed leaflets, and you were just man power, or woman power. You weren’t really empowered, and you were not -- and that power was never shared with you. So we left. I mean, we started thinking about a way out. Well, how is it that we can control the primaries and not just have these horrible people be elected? Like they are
today. I mean, today you have a party that allows Dawnna Dukes -- that hasn’t told her, “Get the hell out. What you’re doing is not correct. Even if the courts say you’re free to go home, it’s not correct. What you did is corrupt.” And even today we have a party that will allow corruption. You cannot imagine what we had to do to get rid of Sheriff Hamilton. We had to run a poor man against him. We had to get half of the vote, half as much vote as he did, take those votes to Lloyd Doggett and say, “Here’s how many votes we got for this opposition candidate. Now get rid of this man. You’re the leader of the party in Travis County. We don’t want a man that’s deporting and cutting apart families.”

So that’s how we got rid of the sheriff, because we finally got the party to understand that we were focusing our attention on working here, where we could focus on other races, and that they were causing losses for the party. Anyway, that’s the way the party was, and still is to a large degree. Parties tend to be that way. People that have control of political parties want to keep the control very close by. They don’t want to share. So we were thinking about a way out, and that’s how thinking in the young people -- we were a little older, about 10 years
older, than the young people that were thinking of starting a third party, Raza Unida. It was that situation that caused us, as a race, as a group, racial group, to go to a third party. That’s how we came about, late ’60s, mid-’60s, late ’60s, started thinking, how can we reform things faster? How can we change policy and government faster? By having a third party. By having -- well, we can talk about that. So in the ’60s, race-wise, this is what we were talking about. And I think one of the most important things that happened in the ’60s in Austin, and Texas, was establishing the Raza Unida Party.

In the late ’60s, we also started thinking about, how can we change the university so that -- and universities in general -- so that we can attract more students of color in? So we started looking -- as early as ’68, we started looking at ways of organizing ethnic studies. The reason -- the way we got the idea for ethnic studies was more because of bilingual education. Bilingual education and bicultural education, the legislation on that, federal legislation in local programs, made us think that, if you taught bilingual education, well, then you have to teach topics that were relevant. You weren’t just going to teach a white curriculum that continued to be meaningless for the
kids, but you’re then teaching it in Spanish. And I’m not talking about math content, or science. I’m talking about -- well, even science, even STEM, can be multicultural, because people have STEM legacies and traditions that are just as legitimate as calendar science, like astronomy, mathematics, that can be incorporated. Because of bilingual education, I believe, is how we started thinking in terms of training our teachers faster, or getting more teachers in the pipeline, and also about more content that was culturally -- that would teach our children cultural competencies for their own culture. That’s what got us started on looking at transforming higher education.

So we started -- oh, that, and also the fact that we had school walkouts in the ’60s. Bilingual education, in a way, generated -- and civil rights -- a lot of interest in reforming the school systems. And so, in Texas, California, Arizona, everywhere -- New Mexico -- we had school walkouts. We had kids who were like, “I don’t like this. I don’t like being discriminated. I don’t like the fact that I can’t speak Spanish.” Despite the fact that we had bilingual education in place then, you can’t speak Spanish in schools. I, myself, got fined 25 -- my school lunch money every time I was caught speaking Spanish, and I
was totally — in high school. That was one of the ways they discriminated against us. This made us think, these walkouts that we -- I participated in walkouts by -- I was working at the Southwest Lab, and we would go -- we would prepare curriculum for teachers that would go into the walkouts as tutors, so that the kids wouldn't lose days of school and wouldn't get behind, and TEA could take into account that they were being tutored while they walked out of school and stayed out of school. So there were school walkouts in Del Rio and Crystal City, in Weslaco, Houston, here -- Del Valle had a walkout.

Everywhere. We helped with that, because I was working, at that time, with Southwest Lab. The lab didn’t help. I almost got fired. But the people within the lab, like Dr. José Cárdenas, and Bambi Cárdenas. José Cárdenas, Dr. Cárdenas, had been the leader in organizing TEAMA. We were working in this educational lab, and I was the information person. So there was a group of people throughout the state working on these issues. So these walkouts then led to our questioning the preparation of teachers, questioning the fact that we had no ethnic studies at the university. And so the university -- we started to agitate with Dr. Sánchez and Dr. Américo Paredes. I was part of -- and my
husband -- part of a group that was agitating to get ethnic studies going in the late ’60s. Then we decided -- well, because of the walkouts, we decided, well, it’s taking too long to train the teachers, and it’s going to take years, so why don’t we start an independent college and get Antioch to support the academic infrastructure and the ties to TEA, so TEA could accredit it, or the Southern Association of College and Universities to accredit it? So we started an independent college in the Valley.

My husband and I went down there to teach there, and from there, then we went to Crystal City to work in the movement. So this independent college was called Colegio Jacinto Treviño. There were other independent colleges in Oregon, in California, and Colorado, but I think ours was the first, the Jacinto Treviño, here in Texas. Then later on it became Juarez Lincoln University, and the archives for Juarez Lincoln University are at the Benson Collection if you need to see them. So we go down there. My husband had graduated. So we go down there, and along with -- we had about eight other people that had been involved in walkouts in Colorado and Texas, and we got this college going. It was actually -- about a year after that, it split, so some stayed in the Valley -- because of politics,
politics that were incorporated from California, and then the college became Juarez Lincoln University, went to Fort Worth, and then came back to Austin. So it was instituted in Austin afterwards. So anyway, that -- so all this, the race activism, had all kinds of strains, and people worked in all kinds of ways. About the same time that we split, we left Austin to go work -- it was always temporary. We always intended to return to Austin. But we left Austin to go to Weslaco area, to Mercedes, Texas, to set up this college, my husband and I, to help set up this college.

Dr. Paredes was one of our (inaudible) faculty members, so we maintained ties with what was going on with the issue of setting up the Center for Mexican American Studies. We kept the ties, because there were very close ties between the independent college and CMAS, that eventually became CMAS. So we stayed in touch with Dr. José Limón, who was a student there, and then Dr. Paredes. So we went to the Valley, and at the same time, we were working, still working, with other activists to form Raza Unida Party. We always had in the back of our minds, yes, we’ve got to have a party. We’ve got to have a progressive party that will address progressive issues that the Democrats are not addressing. Well, so what happened, we formed the party in
1970, and we were -- my husband and I were members of the
founding group, as were people like Linda del Toro, María
Elena Martínez. People that are still active here in
Austin, activists here in Austin. By that time, when the
party was established, Juan and I had moved. We didn’t go
to the college in Fort Worth. We moved to Crystal City.
So we moved to Crystal City. I took a librarian job there,
because I had always been a library and information person,
and my husband took the job of urban renewal director
there. From that base, we worked with a statewide group to
form the party, Raza Unida Party.

Now, Raza Unida Party -- there’s a dissertation to be done
there, and there’s so much work to be done. But Raza Unida
Party, the first election we had in ’72, statewide election
-- the focus of the party was to get local people -- was to
break the hold of the Democratic Party as it was, at the
local level, so we could get more people elected to office
at the local level. It was always intended to be a local
party. And to build the strength of the party from the
bottom up, from the local community, from sheriff and local
commissioners and stuff on the primaries, up. It was never
to start at the state level. But the people like Austin
and Houston and Dallas and El Paso that were in an urban
environment, they wanted it to go statewide, because statewide is where they could add their votes and their power. And I don’t blame them. My husband is very bitter about that. “If we hadn’t got the statewide” -- and (inaudible) too. And I say, “You know, but you can’t blame them, because at the statewide, they could add their vote to a statewide vote and make an impact, but if it just remained local” -- in Austin, the population was so small. It wasn’t like today. At that time, it was growing, but it was still around 16 percent.

There was very little impact they could have. They couldn’t even get on the ballot. But in the big population hubs -- rural, primarily, in the Valley, South Texas Valley, and in Winter Garden area, like Crystal City, where they were 80 percent of the population -- they could get on the ballot. Both groups had a basis for wanting local -- the party to be largely localized, or the party to be a statewide party. But having a statewide party did diffuse a lot of the potential power that could have been put on the local level. I still think that if we had been more sophisticated, we could have pulled it off okay, somehow. Perhaps not by starting with and continuing to run for the governor’s position, but by running for other positions.
Anyway, that’s the way it happened. I like -- a lot of people are disillusioned. To me, I am totally different. I am like, this is the best thing that’s ever happened in my life. This is the best thing that’s ever happened to Texas. It is going to be a while -- not even that long, maybe within five years -- we will have a strong Democratic Party in Texas, but it will be a Democratic Party if we don’t let the Republicans creep in. It will be -- if you people, you young people -- young people defend the party and the values of the party, and don’t let the Republicans creep back in, it will be a strong liberal -- it will be a strong progressive and moderate Democratic Party.

But it will be strong. And it’s growing like that. Can you imagine -- political scientists need to look at this, seriously look at this. The impact that Raza Unida had was extremely important in the rise of the Republican Party, and that’s where the Democrats just hated us. But Raza Unida did two things, and political scientists need to study the dynamics, and explain the dynamics, and explain the numbers and everything. But Raza Unida did two very, very important things. Number one, it flushed the Republicans out of the Democratic Party. Flushed them out. You know, [makes sound effect]. Because I think,
psychologically, it was important for the Republicans to see that a third party could actually get 200,000 votes in the state, which is what Raza Unida got. That they had actually bigger strength than the Mexican American voting strength. I think they were able to see that. We showed them that. Okay? Number two, I think that they saw that the Democratic Party could be split. We split it, and that’s why the Democratic Party hated us. It took them 20 years to forgive some of us for having left. When we came back, they called us born-again Democrats, after the Raza Unida Party didn’t exist anymore. But we split the party, but I think we split it in a good way.

We left the Democratic Party weakened, because even when we came back, we drifted back very, very slowly. Very, very slowly, we drifted back, and they lost 70 percent. I think they lost about 70 -- this is what I mean, that somebody has to do a dissertation on this. I think they lost about 70 percent of their strength. But it wasn’t strength. It was like -- if something looks big, and healthy to you because it’s big, but you have a tumor in there, how does that benefit you and your body and your ability to be healthy? And that’s what the Republican Party was to the Democrat. You had schizoid party. You had a bipolar
party. You had a party that was totally antithesis to Democratic values. Seventy percent. And we cut it off. We cut it off. They could see that could happen. It’s true that Raza Unida -- because Raza Unida came from the Democratic Party, so we cut off that part of the party, the 20 percent that made up the liberal wing of the party, the progressive party, and we left the moderates behind, and then 70 percent of the Republicans split. They left. They left. To me, that gave the Democratic Party its health back, and it gave it its vision back, and it gave it its values back.

You had to start from scratch, because then the Democratic Party had to start growing on its own values and on its own strength, and not on the false strength of this tumor that they had growing in there that didn’t represent Democratic values. That’s when the Republican Party -- there was no Republican Party to speak of in Texas before Raza Unida. None. They had flushed it out, flushed it out when it became a Southern Democratic Party. Anyway, so that’s one thing that we did for the Democratic Party. The other thing that we did, that has to do with race issues, because it’s still all about race -- the other thing that we did for the Democratic Party that was very useful is that the
Raza Unida Party was very radical. It was very radical in its international politics, it was very radical in immigration, it was very radical in women’s rights, and I will explain to you why, because something that developed on gender issues with the party. It was very, very radical in social issues. It was very radical on economic equity. It was radical in everything -- and if you want to study a good platform, look at the Raza Unida platform. It was ours, and we could put down every wish list that we wanted for our community, and we could do it freely. There was nobody, no stupid racist, to vote us down.

The whole world was open to us. This is a large group of voters that we tore away from the Democratic Party, and that’s why they were so bitter. They were bitter because they don’t understand the ultimate benefit to the party. That if they ever grow a party that will be predominant in Texas, they owe it to the Raza Unida Party. The thing that Raza Unida Party did on race, social, and gender issues was pushing the remaining Democratic Party to the left, so that it impacted the moderate wing of the party to make the Democratic Party more progressive, and it gave strength to the liberal wing to make it more progressive. The party became -- and we hope that, based on the work that you all
do with the party in the future -- the party became a real Democratic Party. A very, very progressive party, as parties go in Texas. Still not as progressive as Raza Unida was, but Raza Unida -- I mean, looking at that platform, people like Gonzalo Barrientos, who was an activist with us but split -- so a lot of us went this way. Moya, Barrientos, Margaret Gomez -- all of them stayed, just locally, stayed with the Democratic Party, while the more radical activists in Austin went with Raza Unida Party. Nevertheless, the impact was to make the Democratic Party more progressive, because they were in competition with us.

The Republicans were not in competition with us. The Democrats were, for voters. We offered support for the ERA, Equal Rights Amendment. Well, then, the Democratic Party had to follow suit. If we offered this, the Democratic Party had to follow suit, because otherwise they would look like the Republicans. You know what I mean? So, to me, that was a real -- to me, I just think the Raza Unida Party was the best thing that ever happened to Texas. Plus, it really gave us a legacy of children and grandchildren that could grow up unafraid of their values -- political values, social values, Democratic values --
like the Castro brothers, because their mother was one of the founders of Raza Unida, like us. You knew that?

Q: Yeah.

A: Right. You knew that Rosie was one of the founders of Raza Unida, from San Antonio. There were founders from here, founders from Houston. Anyway, on race, politics, this is like super, super, super, super, super, super important. After Raza Unida, then we -- that's the impact it had. Then we went back to the Democratic Party of -- we went back of sorts. Almost everybody now that was Raza Unida is supportive, because we came from the Democratic Party. So we kind of went back to the Democratic Party, but as more radical politicians, always more radical. [Roberto Rodriguez?]. There are people in the legislature, the caucus, the legislature -- the Latino caucus was all Raza Unida. Can you believe that? And they have held strong. If they weren't -- I would say all Raza Unida. I'm saying a big proportion of them were Raza Unida legacies, either actual participants or children of Raza Unida people. People like Paul Moreno were some of those -- and the remaining Democrats, or the Democrats that remained in the Democratic Party, became freer to express radical positions, like Paul Moreno -- he just died -- (inaudible) and others -- Sylvia -- Sylvia, who's a senator -- many of
them were then freer to express more radical positions, and to be elected within the Democrat -- than they had been before, or would have been -- they were young adults -- would have been as adults running for office. They were freer to be more radical. Because the party became more radical because of us. So then other race issues that have continued to plague Austin have been -- and continue to plague Austin -- have been the issues of segregation in schools and housing. We worked on segregation issues in 1967, when Austin’s solution to integration was to integrate blacks and Mexican Americans.

And that’s Austin. Austin is very racist, and continues to be. Their solution to integration by law, when they were forced to, was, okay, we’ll integrate blacks and Latinos. We were already integrated. So we said, no, let’s have a city-wide integration plan. It didn’t work very well. Never has worked. Because Austin is very entrenched in its racism. Even today, the CodeNEXT thing, that whole CodeNEXT, changing the codes and all of that, the whole gentrification of Austin, the potential gentrification of South Austin, Northeast Austin, is the failure of the city to recognize that it’s not only a class issue, but it’s a race issue, and that the privileged white community is
empowered to act in its own interest, and everybody else can go to hell. All they do is -- we don’t care where you live, as long as you come and clean our caca. That’s all they care about. Until we raise incomes in Austin, people -- it’s not affordable housing we need. It’s living wage that we need, so people can afford housing in the city. You know? Then we need to find housing solutions that will be -- so housing will be available not just to working-class people, but to teachers, social workers, nurses, and other people that have to live on regular middle-class incomes.

We have to figure out affordability in Austin that will enable people to be part of the middle class. My mother worked a minimum-wage job, but we never failed to be middle-class. We were always part of the middle class, and that’s because, on that wage that she got, we were able to live in a middle-class neighborhood. Right now, working-class people cannot afford to live in a middle-class neighborhood. That’s what I keep telling the mayor, you know, it’s not affordable housing that you need; it’s a living wage that you need in the city. Once you have living wages, then people will find a way to develop affordable housing for themselves, or to be able to live in
an apartment downtown, or close to town, and not to lose. Because right now, you don’t make enough money to be able to pay your local taxes, so you lose your house. For example, the Garden Terrace neighborhood -- and that’s a race and class issue. I mean, yeah. That has to do with race, trying to cleanse the inner city of people that are not white, and also a class issue, because through the economic inequalities, you get rid of them. It’s not that they’re not producing, because God darn it, you see the man that’s producing that wall for us. I mean, they are producing, and they work hard, and they should be paid more than people sitting up in those office towers, pushing paper around.

The people in Garden Terrace -- which is probably the next neighborhood to go -- and those are people around Memorial High School, east, east, past airport, kind of against 183. Not quite the other side of 183. Okay, the income there is less than 15,000 dollars a year. Okay? That much. They’re making that much, they’re doing well. The house ownership in there is about 70 percent, which is very high for a poor neighborhood, minority neighborhood, mostly Mexican American. Okay, but if you make that amount, and you’re making about a thousand a month, and your taxes on
the home that you own, 300 dollars a month or more -- and that is more than that -- I can assure you it’s more than that -- you can’t live. You’re in affordable housing, but the tax is making it --

Q: Not affordable.

A: Not affordable. Our own house, if we didn’t have the income to pay the 700-dollar taxes, and the 300-dollar insurance, and the 200-300-dollar maintenance as retirees -- we’re not retired. The reason we can afford it is because we’re going to be 80 and we’re not retired. We’re still working full-time. To be able to live in the house that you already own, you end up paying, minimum, 1,500 dollars a month, and you’re not making that in Social Security, and you don’t have other retirement, then you own your home, but it’s not affordable housing anymore. That’s why so many retirees have to leave the city and go to the suburbs, or to other towns where housing is affordable now. God knows what’s going to happen in the future. Anyway, that’s Austin. I mean, they’re always plagued -- the class and income inequality in Austin, and race, has always served to colonize and to discriminate against poor people from the day I got here to now. I mean, every day, it’s an issue. In fact, I posted the other day, I want to wake up one day with peace in my heart, knowing that on that day,
somebody, some government entity or somebody, isn’t going to do something to hurt the community. Just one day. I’ve yet to see that day in 54 years. That’s how bad it is in Austin. It’s this combination of race discrimination that still prevails, and class discrimination that empowers the privileged, that drives local politics and policies, and that make it -- just today, just right now, I’m working on two horrendous issues. One, closing up all of these Austin schools. Eventually they want to close 23 schools, and that would be 23 schools in the inner city.

That means 23 schools that will not be public education, not provide public education to the community that works downtown, and even the ones that live downtown, and that will be privatized. Because eventually, there will be schools, but they’ll be charter and public schools. [phone rings] Okay, she’s sending me a -- I love this woman. [Spanish] She’s sending me something I need. The other issue is that they’re trying to put a big monster thing on our land in the Mexican American Cultural Center, that we won after 40 years of advocacy and activism for ourselves, out of tax dollars. And now they want to put a convention center thing on the land. Okay, those are big issues. We let these policies go through, and we let them do this,
they’re going to continue to do this all our lives. We’re not -- they look at us as -- they disenfranchise us, and they steal our money, because we are taxpayers, but they don’t treat us like taxpayers. Do you ever feel like a taxpayer? They don’t make you feel like a taxpayer.

Q: No, I don’t.

A: Right. And yet property owners don’t pay the taxes. The people that rent the properties pay the taxes. And then the people that own their properties and live in them, like me and my residents, I pay my taxes. Nobody pays them for me. So you live in your residence, you pay your taxes. You live in somebody’s rented property, because you rent from them, you pay their taxes. So either way, we pay our taxes. We don’t avoid our taxes. So why do they avoid giving us quality services? That’s avoidance on their part. But anyway, so we did Raza Unida for those reasons. Then, other things that we did for civil rights -- write minority ordinances for -- well, develop a Spanish Chamber of Commerce in 1973. My husband and I were founders of that. That was to gain some kind of economic equity in the city. People don’t ever understand economic equity. It’s really hard to understand, because that’s something that policymakers and politicians keep hidden. Because behind all the racism, basically, is economics. Because from the
very beginning, if you read a book called Unequal Freedoms, [Spanish] Unequal Freedoms, there’s a wonderful explanation of how race, in the colonial period, was put as a boogeyman, boogeywoman, in front of class, so that people would think of race to discriminate against and forget about class discrimination against themselves. That’s still happening today, with the current election that happened. That’s always been the case, that race is used as a way to hide economic inequality and the things that are done to us economically. So we’ve always fought race. We go -- income inequality.

So we developed a chamber to gain some income equality. I wrote -- I was a founder of the chamber, along with my husband and many, many other local businesspeople, when we came back to Austin in ’73. We came back in ’73, and that was the year that we participated in establishing the Chamber of Commerce. In ’74, I established Mexican American Business Professional Women for a reason dealing with gender. But continuing on the race activism, we developed the Chamber of Commerce, and then within about -- I was secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, and we developed the Spanish Chamber of Commerce to give us economic equity, to demand -- not to demand, but to take
advantage of our own market. To develop a union of businesses that would buy from each other and use each other’s services to give us economic strength, and to confront the city on economic issues. So about 10 years later, or maybe even less, after the founding, I developed the first MBWB ordinance, and boy, I got in so much trouble over that. I developed a database of businesses, local businesses, that were really, really big. Identified all the local businesses, had a computerized database, and then, through the chamber, in a chamber committee, went after tourism dollars, and then we went after -- we established a minority purchasing council, and we established and wrote -- I wrote the ordinance -- MBWB ordinance.

Then that ordinance was also picked up by CapMetro and by the school district, and that ordinance was about equity in contracting for services out of tax dollars that the city was collecting from us. So it’s only fair that if we’re going to pay taxes on bonds and everything, that our businesses get contracting opportunities, and that’s what it was about. I wrote that ordinance. So I want to get out there that -- because it’s not about recognition or anything. It’s about awareness in children and students
that read this, and empowerment, to say, if something is
not there, you can create it. You don’t have to sit around
and be a statistic. If you don’t have a housing ordinance,
you write the damn ordinance. If you don’t have an
ordinance that addresses economic taxation issues, you
write the ordinance. You can do it. That’s why I say
that, that I did it. It came from here. Of course, it
came from also studying, researching. We get down to that,
why did you become a writer or researcher? Because I can.

But I wrote the ordinance, and then through the Chamber of
Commerce, and then we instituted -- so now we have a
department of MBWBs, what we call a minority business
enterprise, women-owned business enterprises, because we
also brought in the women. So there was a good marriage
between race and gender, equity issues. I always did that.
From my very first work, I’ve always incorporated gender
into all my activism, and we’ll talk about that. So we did
the chamber. We did MABPWA, which was race-oriented,
because it was Mexican American Business Professional Women
-- was to bring equity, to bring women to the forefront,
minority women, and the needs of minority women. So it was
race, and then gender. So we’ll talk about that
organization on the gender issue. What other
organizations, so that I don’t forget? Women -- Mexican American Business. Oh, and we also did -- okay. At the same time that we were doing all of this, that we were doing our economic -- trying to build a strong economic foundation for ourselves in the city after I came back and joined the group that was moving to establish the chamber, we also were working on the cultural arts. Juan and I have always been very, very, very interested in the arts, being an architect and being very interested in art. If you look around my office and my house -- this is Santa Barraza, Amado Pena, Montoya -- very famous artists, photographers.

We have a massive arts collection of originals. So we’ve always been very interested in the cultural arts. From 1974 -- we came back in ’73. Seventy-four, Juarez Lincoln University had come back here, and I had written a proposal for them to establish a migrant information clearinghouse. So my condition on writing the proposal had been, when I come back to Austin, you give me a job with it. I want to direct it, or at least be assistant director, which I was. So I got a job as assistant director of that. That, Juarez Lincoln University, was a hub for creative cultural arts community. From Juarez Lincoln University, we supported the -- oh, and all this period that I was away from Austin,
I was attending meetings and I was on the advisory committee for the Center for Mexican American Studies. Because having been a founder of Colegio Jacinto Trevino, and being a librarian now for, then, like 15 years, almost 18 years by then, I had the background to help with the advisory, and I had been very close to the students and the professors at UT -- Dr. Paredes, he continued to collaborate with us, Dr. Sanchez. So when we came back, we continued to activate for getting the center built, even as we had Juarez Lincoln University already here in Austin. They collaborated very closely.

In fact, we had people that worked at Juarez Lincoln University, and also worked at UT, and that provided -- so we would do a function at Juarez Lincoln University, and then maybe UT would publish the proceedings. So we had a very collaborative system. Also, that enabled us to continue -- I was working at Juarez Lincoln, which was established, actually, at that time, in the beginning, at St. Edward’s University, and I was working on the migrant information clearinghouse project, but collaborating with UT. So it’s all going on very dynamic, very organic system. We continued to activate for that. CMAS, at UT, was established, I guess around ’72 -- was it ’72 or ’74?
We just celebrated some big anniversary. But we hosted Floricanto events that were national in scope, that were kind of like NACCS now, Chicano Studies Association. They were literature and arts. They brought in scholars from all over. It was the forerunner to NACCS, the Association of -- National Chicano Studies Association. So we had these events, and we had a couple of them here, one in '74 and one in '76 -- '75, I believe. I forget the years. We had those events at Juarez Lincoln, and sometimes at UT, and we decided that we needed a big cultural arts center in Austin to host these events, and to bring the community in.

Because these events were never -- and that’s one thing that we fought against a couple of years ago, protested, the cutting off of the community from programming at UT. Because all of a sudden, the community -- and they’re still not going to events at UT. So we need to do -- because they were cut off by very bad people there that have stepped down since. So we need to do some more outreach now to bring the community back in. At that time, it was very fluid. The community would attend things at Juarez Lincoln University, and they would attend things at CMAS, and back and forth. So Floricanto grew out of that collaboration between UT and the community, and we decided...
that we needed to build a cultural arts center that would be big and funded by the city. That would be the city’s contribution. That’s when we started working -- about ’74. There was an organization called Lucha that was formed. We were not integral members of Lucha, because they were the artists, but we were the supporters. That’s how we came to build the Mexican American Cultural Center. There was a lot of activism along race issues and cultural issues in the arts from ’73 on. We supported building the cultural center. We supported Mexic-Arte Museum, that Sylvia -- a movement person established on Second Street, in a warehouse. We supported her.

We supported La Peña, Cynthia Peréz’s building, La Peña, and then the Indigenous Women’s Network. We supported the rec centers having -- the libraries in Austin being more -- having more local libraries in the East Austin community, and having them more engaged in programs, and the rec centers being more involved in cultural events as well. So all of this race activism was all about -- I think it’s all been about community building. Political power, perhaps we have not been as -- we have not paid as much attention as we should to it, although we did, from the very beginning that they started Mexican American Democrats, those of us --
- they started that because of Raza Unida. They started Mexican American Democrats, which was good. Then when we came back to the party, we worked on those efforts politically, but they have never been -- I don’t think that our political activity in Austin on race issues, or identifying our race, minorities, has been as strong as activism on social issues, economic equity, and cultural arts. That’s just my impression. Because we’ve always been so -- oh, and on health issues.

Through the Mexican American Business and Professional Women, that I’ll talk to about gender in a little bit, we developed a strong infrastructure for supporting -- providing health services to not only the minority community, but the low-income community and the working-class community in Austin. That was something that was both race and class-oriented. But the cultural arts is something that, all along that we were supporting economic equity and race equity and housing and social services and health services, we were also supporting the cultural arts. We were supporting all these organizations that are now very big institutions, hopefully thriving. It’s very hard to keep institutions -- well, the two institutions that are really strong are thriving because they’ve got very strong
leaders. Cynthia Peréz, her sister, Lidia, and then Sylvia Orozco at the helm. They both happen to be run by women. The cultural arts center has always been -- Mexican American Center -- has always been a lot more difficult, because it’s involved a more diverse community of leadership, and it has involved more men. They’ve created a lot of problems, all the time. Continue to create it. Today, I’m working on a presentation to protect the MAC, again, from incursions that would destroy it, that would tend to transform it or destroy it, because they want to bring -- they’re saying continuing funding to finish out the campus would have to rely on funding from the convention center, which then could potentially take over.

So we have to say no, there’s no conditions, because this is our center. It’s not the convention center’s center. Anyway, because it’s on six acres of very valuable lakefront property. That’s why. The big issue today, in terms of race, that continues to plague us, and that we’re still working on every day, is education, with the potential closure of the inner-city schools, which I think they’re doing it to hurt minority children deliberately. I mean, I say that without equivocation. But we’re trying to save the schools and the city from themselves, because if
they do this, they will hurt the inner city, period. They will destroy public education in the inner city. A lot of times, in order to protect our community, we actually are protecting the institutions themselves. That’s our job. Maybe I’ll go to a different time when I die, and I’ll go to a different job, and I hope I have an easier job. But my job in this lifetime, in Austin, has been just amazing. I mean, I lost a son to race. My son was murdered by -- kidnapped and murdered by two young black people.

Every summer -- this happened in 1997. Every summer, at the end of the school year, I would cry and pray for something positive for black children and brown children to have to do that would not involve violence, because every summer you saw a spike in violence and crime, because they took away the work programs for the kids, the employment programs for the kids, in summer, because black children everywhere, and brown children of a certain class everywhere, have no hope and have no future, and have nothing even today. I always saw it as a cancer. Very selfishly, I always thought, well, I hope I’m never victimized by this cancer. You know? But cancer is not forgiving. Cancer can invade anything and everybody. That’s what it is. Racism and economic inequity is a
cancer. One evening a month after my son graduated from high school -- he was a gorgeous boy. Handsome, smart, politically involved. He worked in Kirk Watson’s campaign. He was a campaign worker for Kirk Watson in his run for mayor. One month after graduation, he was kidnapped downtown, a block from the police station -- couple of blocks -- on Fifth Street, and murdered. Kidnapped. They took him around to get money from the banks. They kidnapped another boy, who was a student of architecture at UT. They put him in the trunk of the car, and they threw him in the lake to drown.

You know, I blame the city. I don’t blame the boys. We went after -- we got the other family to agree to try to -- to express our opinion. We can’t convince the DA, but to express our opinion that they should not get the death penalty, because they were both slated. That was a capital crime. They could have gotten the death penalty. And the other family agreed, after a year of waiting and researching, and they’re looking into all the facts and all of that. The youths were a 17- and a 16-year-old black youth. No hope. Well, the 16-year-old came from a reasonably -- a very stable family, and didn’t have any antecedents [Spanish]. But he was in bad company, and very
young. Both of them, very young, and we all know that youth, up until the age of 25, do not have the frontal lobe developed, that they don’t have any critical judgment to speak of, and that they do stupid things. And these boys were on drugs. And it’s a very, very stupid thing that, when they were doing it until when they caught them, they finally realized what they had done, and it was really horrible. Thanks to that, the DA decided not to press charges -- not to ask for the death penalty in their case. So they were not given the death penalty, but they were given horrible prison sentences, like 80 years.

Give me a break. I mean, you know. They were 16 and 17, so they’re in prison for life, without a chance of parole. Which is very tragic. It’s like four lives lost. That got us started, my husband and I started, on working against the death penalty, and especially for youth. Eventually -- so we’d go to the legislature and testify and testify and testify. Eventually, the Supreme Court ruled against the death penalty for youth. Minor victory there, but horribly long, long, long sentences for the youth. Which brings me to, racism that brings social and economic inequality, and patriarchy that is entrenched, kill. I think that that’s a good ending right there to our race discussion, because
racism kills. If we think that we’re safe because we live in a moderate or high-income neighborhood, or that we’re safe because we are the privileged class that has professional jobs and good incomes -- nobody is safe. When you allow this cancer to exist in a community like Austin or anywhere in the world, nobody is safe from the cancer that gets back at you. I’m not saying my husband and I should have been exempt, since we have worked all our lives against inequity and racism, but nobody is safe.

No matter how hard you work, you are not safe, because you’re part of that system, and because that system exists, and because that system is going to bring bad actors that have -- bad victims, I should say -- victims are going to strike back. If these kids don’t have an income, don’t have jobs, don’t have opportunities for getting decent jobs, don’t have summer programs, don’t have anything meaningful in their lives, they’re going to get it somehow. They’re going to steal your son or your daughter, they’re going to throw them in the trunk of the car, they’re going to use their credit card to get money from the ATMs, and they’re going to get caught, and they’re going to get killed as well, even as they kill other youth. Racism and patriarchy kills. That’s all there is. It’s deadly. And
it should not exist, in a world of civilized being and societies. But we’re not very civilized in terms of race and class. We’re not there. So now, if we could spend a few minutes maybe -- I hate to say on gender issues, because a lot of these -- that we’re going to spend a little bit of time on gender issues. But a lot of these same activities have a gender kind of component.

Q: They all very intersect.
A: Exactly, because you cannot -- should we check and make sure we’re recording?

Q: Yes.
A: I think we are.
Q: Yes, we’re still recording.
A: Okay, very good.
Q: Let me check the battery. Yeah, battery’s --
A: And it’s running?
Q: Yes, it’s running. Perfect.
A: Along with -- even as early -- okay, along with fighting the race battles, most of us, like Cynthia Peréz, for example, and Sylvia, and some of the leadership that I’ve mentioned -- María Elena Martínez, Linda del Toro -- that were founders of Raza Unida and founders of La Peña and founders of the Indigenous Women’s Network, and of all these wonderful -- and the MAC -- all these wonderful
institutions, we were also active on gender issues. With Raza Unida, for example, we always said, well, if we’re looking for liberation, if we’re looking for Chicano liberation, it’s not for liberating Chicanos. It’s for liberating Chicano Chicanas. It’s for liberating families. It’s for liberating children. Liberation, if you’re talking about liberation for a group of people, does not divide itself. It’s liberation for all. When man started talking about, no, wait a minute, I get liberated -- in fact, in one case, I was told, “You go do the dishes and take care of the children like you’re supposed to.”

We had to explain to men that liberation is -- that culture and liberation, because -- according to our culture. They were always saying, well, our culture -- we can be liberated, but our culture says that you should be doing the dishes, that you should be doing this, that we have gender-assigned roles. We’re saying, no, liberation cuts across culture, and culture itself cannot be defined as logistics. You are confusing logistics, activities, with culture. Culture is a certain point of view about communities, families, and liberation, and equality, that is not defined by who does what jobs -- does not assign jobs to people either. So we had to -- even as we were
working on issues of liberation in the movement, in all aspects of the movement -- the arts movement, the political movement, Raza Unida, the social justice movement within the overall umbrella of the Chicano movement -- we had to -- women more than men, because men already were -- they considered themselves liberated within our community, not under the colonialist system. But as they worked on liberation under the colonialist system that we live, they thought it was just for themselves, literally, and that women would kind of keep their place, and that women would not step up and demand equal rights, because we were liberating them, not us.

We had to explain. In the process of explaining, not only to men but to women as well -- because we wanted women to step up and run for office and to be leaders within the movement and in the communities, and that’s why we were educating everybody to be participants. I’m not saying just leaders, because we never were about -- that’s our problem in a way. We weren’t about leaders, but as participants in this movement, equal participants, we had to explain. That entailed bringing forth -- you asked about how do you put your skills to work. That entailed using my skills as a researcher, as an archivist, as a
bibliographer, as a librarian, and as somebody that had abilities to write, to take to the pen, and to research these issues, and to write books like *Diosa y Hembra*, that would explain how this was not new. That we were acting out in accordance to our culture. That we had a legacy of participation in economic, social, political lives of our communities and work, and that we intended to act on this legacy of participation. That’s how I wrote *Diosa y Hembra*, and then the essays in *Chicana Feminist*. They’re all essays on talks that I gave on the issue of liberation for women.

The other ways in which we were activists on gender issues was even with a bilingual program. Because when bilingual education came to be, and we started, through bilingual education, getting into cultural studies, and then we started promoting teacher training with cultural competencies -- which is why we established Colegio Jacinto Trevino before university-instituted Chicano studies, because they were so slow. In instituting Chicano studies, under cultural competencies, we had to also start looking at gender roles, and we had to start looking at gender history and gender participation. Because when you look at culture -- this is why I’m so excited about ethnic studies,
because as you look at ethnic studies, and you look at how people have acted and played out their historic participation, you can’t help but look at women. If you just look at an Anglo white man, it’s a long stretch to looking at Chicanos, and then looking at women. But if you’re looking at cultural studies, you’re closer to the source, and closer to looking at women’s participation. We started -- because of bilingual education -- thank God for civil rights. Civil rights gave rise to the movements, and also to bilingual education that gave rise to me.

There’s a strong relationship between bilingual education and ethnic studies, and our centers -- Chicano studies at the universities. We started looking at gender roles, too, and we started looking at -- and women, because under Civil Rights they got Title IX, so they got women’s studies, they also started looking at that. In the early ’60s, as early as the early ’60s, we were beginning to look at gender participation within the cultura and how it was expressed in language and bilingual education. A lot of bilingual teachers -- again, I mentioned Modesto, I mentioned María Elena Martínez -- who became chair of the Raza Unida Party. She was an elementary school teacher. Started looking at gender roles because of teaching bilingual education and
cultural studies. You can’t avoid cultural studies. That’s why they fight bilingual education, because it brings cultural and ethnic studies in. That gave us an in. Academically, we started looking at gender issues because of our trajectory in promoting bilingual education and multicultural education. We started looking at gender issues when we started looking at CMAS and establishing ethnic studies at UT. We thought, well, you can’t have ethnic studies without women’s studies.

I herded up and did a lot of research on women’s studies, so that when we started to teach Chicano studies, there was, at least in the beginning, a component on history of women. That gave rise to the first Chicana studies courses that were taught at UT in the early ’70s. A lot of the input into those courses were the materials that I prepared and the materials that I collected and got into those courses. That’s how gender studies crept into ethnic studies and Chicano studies at UT. I’m sure that -- and I know for a fact, in California, kind of the same trajectory was followed. California and Texas, I think, have been leaders, pretty much leaders, in Chicano studies, until very current times. I also thought, okay, with Raza Unida Party, Raza Unida was about social justice and was about
changing policies and politics at the local, state, and national level, but more so, changing politics so we could change policies. You need to change the battery?

Q: No, I was just checking because it was blinking, but it’s still recording.

A: Okay. Policies -- and so, in the process -- everybody thinks Raza Unida was all about political power. Actually, I’m very proud of Raza Unida, because Raza Unida was developed -- at least half of the reason -- 50 percent or more of the reason for developing the Raza Unida Party was to institute policies that were good for working-class people. For people of all classes, but for protection of the working-class community, the agricultural migrants, immigrants, and working-class people, all working-class people. So Raza Unida attracted a lot of Anglos, because it was a very progressive party. It was very strongly based on instituting policies through progressive politics. So the difference between politics and policies. We supported a political party, but the condition was that we would institute policies. So when we challenged the party -- because the guys were young, and to them it was just so much fun. They could have the girls -- like Trump -- all the girls they wanted. Some of them. Some of them were quite serious. But a lot of them, it was really a way to
amass a lot of power. A lot of them, like my husband, who had been involved in racial politics and activism, and integrating societies, and building low-income housing--because he had led a program, when he was a student at UT, against urban renewal that got us the MAC land, around that area, and he had also worked on integration, and he had also worked on self-help housing. In fact, based on his activism in architecture, in those fields, he is a fellow of the College of Architects at the national level. He was elected a fellow.

So people like Juan and others that were supportive of the cultural arts, that were supportive of housing, that were supportive of health, men and women, wanted a party to address these policies, and to put them in the platform. For that reason, we needed the involvement of women. Women were not as focused on this power binge. They were focused on policies. What is this going to do to pay equity for women? What is it going to do for reproductive services? Reproductive rights was supported by the party. Supported by the party. ERA was supported by the party. What is this going to do for women’s reproductive rights? What is this going to do for housing for women? What is this going to do for childcare? What is this going to do for
immigrants? What is this -- all the issues that concern health care, women, were front and center. Some guys wanted to limit the participation of women. For us, to limit the participation of women was to limit these policies, the importance of these policies being assumed by the party. There was urgency in getting a gender movement going. In order to achieve these policies, we needed to achieve liberation, and we needed for the movement -- for the party particularly, and the movement as a whole -- but for us, the political party, Raza Unida, to recognize equality of the genders.

So, from the very beginning -- very beginning -- we formed a women’s caucus within the party. We formed a women’s caucus. Then we formed a group called Mujeres Pro-Raza Unida. That was a group that we started, and Rosie was certainly part of it -- Evey Chapa, Lydia Espinosa, María Elena Martínez again, a lot of the women that were leaders in the party -- that we started specifically for campaign workshops for women, consciousness-raising, and to expand the participation, to bring more women in, and to make it attractive for women from other parties to join Raza Unida Party, because we had actual nuts-and-bolts training for women. I forgot to mention, in forming the Raza Unida
Party, the interest of a lot of us, beyond gaining power at the local level and state level, and having an influence on the major parties -- what attracted us to forming our own party was learning party mechanics and political mechanics, campaigns, everything, from day one. Getting those skills that the Democratic Party did not allow us to get. They never let us into working with the nuts and bolts of the party. That was our big beef, that we were not getting any development. So Raza Unida provided that opportunity for us to develop a party from the ground up.

Can you imagine what that involved? It was amazing. I loved it. So the necessity of promoting policies that were good for women, children, and everybody in the family, and the community as a whole, and the state as a whole, and the nation as a whole meant that we had to raise the consciousness of women on these policy and political issues, and have the party recognize the strength and power of women within. So we formed the caucus, and we formed a group within the party that would address political training of women, and political participation of women. Then, at the same time that we were organizing the party, or -- well, the party was organized first in 1970, established in 1970, and lasted until about '79, 1979.
Lasted about 10 years. At the same time, the women, white women, were organizing a women’s movement in the ’60s. They came to institutionalize organizations in the early ’70s. Nineteen seventy-two was the establish of the National Women’s Political Caucus. There was the establishment of the state Texas political caucus, Texas Women’s Political Caucus, and the local Austin Women’s Political Caucus. Then we had local organizations. I was in Crystal City then, because we came back in ’73.

But I came to Austin for the establishment of the National Women’s Caucus and the state caucus and the local caucus. We also organized a local caucus in Crystal City. Having the women’s movement organize a caucus, and knowing that there were going to be a lot of Chicanas in the national, state, and local caucuses, or should be, some Democratic women, we thought, well, we’ll bring Raza Unida women into the caucus as a party caucus. In the Texas Women’s Political Caucus, we had the Democratic Women’s Caucus, and we had the Republican Women’s Caucus, and we had the Raza Unida Women’s Caucus. So we formed a caucus of Raza Unida women within the Texas Women’s Political Caucus. We brought the caucus from -- we had it at our party, we had a training group, and then we had -- the caucus came over to
join the Texas Women’s Political Caucus. One of the reasons was the same thing, to promote policies within the Texas Women’s Political Caucus and the national caucus that would be effective for minority women, for us. Only we could do it, because we knew what the issues were, and we could bring them to the platforms of these women, and incorporate them, and make these policies be recognized across party lines, and influence Democratic women and challenge them to be more progressive on women’s issues. So there’s, again, another opportunity that Raza Unida women had to influence white women to be more progressive.

So Raza Unida caucus, Raza Unida Party, from day one, supported ERA, the Equal Rights Amendment, while the Democratic Party was still like, eh, what are we going to do? And reproductive services, health, for women. All of these wonderful things, then, we were under this umbrella. That’s how we came to be involved with the feminist movement. We were criticized horribly. We made some mistakes, but we were criticized horribly by our men. Our men were constantly saying, “Well, you’re not real Chicanas if you’re involved with white women, and white women just want to subjugate men and us and our men,” blah, blah, blah. But you know what? We felt that if we wanted to
make gains for women, locally, statewide, and nationally, we could lend our strength and skills to do that, and it was important to do that. And that if we didn’t do this, we couldn’t claim these rights for ourselves. [Spanish]

You know? I don’t want anybody to say, “Oh, I liberated you.” As it is -- as it is -- white women, in their recounting of the women’s movement, will claim that they liberated us. [Spanish] They will claim that. As it is, if it had been a fact, it would be worse. They could then claim it truthfully. The truth was that we came into the movement as very organized, and by that time -- I mean, look at me. I had been active since high school. I had been active -- I got into high school in 1952, and by ’72, I had at least 20 years of activism on race issues and on local -- I was active in El Paso in getting a library -- I worked in the public library -- getting a library established for the public housing community in El Paso, and active in the political clubs. I was in my early 30s -- 31 or so -- and I had 20 years of activism already. I was not a novice.

Q: More than some women in --

A: Yeah, and a lot of women -- most of our women -- some women that were in the caucus and in the Raza Unida caucus, like Ms. Múzquiz in Crystal City, she had been a candidate in
'63, a candidate for office in the Democratic Party already. She was one that established the Raza Unida Party in terms of its legal structure, and she knew as much election law as Bullock, Bob Bullock, who was secretary of state. One time we called him and we said, “We’re wondering about something in the election code in setting up the Raza Unida Party,” and he said, “What does Ms. Múzquiz say?” I said, “She says this.” “Do it the way she says. She knows as much election law as I do.” That’s what he said. Ms. Múzquiz was José Ángel Gutiérrez’s political mentor.

She had -- I would say, if I had 20 years of experience, Ms. Múzquiz had 40 years. So this is what we brought to the table. We didn’t bring any -- just novices. So it was very important for us to join, and it was very important for us to be at the table. It was very important for us to be supportive of equal rights. Because then, [Spanish]. Nobody could reproach us that we were Johnny-come-latelies, that they liberated us, and that if it hadn’t been for us, blah, blah, blah, blah. We knew what we were doing, but the guys were extremely critical that we were active in the women’s movement, because they said that we were (inaudible), that we were copying them, blah, blah, blah.
We said, no, and that’s when I wrote and did a lot of my training on our legacy. I wrote -- our women have been members of a resistance movement that has resisted the colonia and colonialist mentality since at least the conquest. We bring that to the table. Here’s the proof. These are the women that have been -- this is our legacy from our indigenous tradition, from the goddess tradition. Bring the virgins on, because they were -- Guadalupe was a champion. She went to battle. They had her image in battle. The independentistas had her as the forefront in the battles. Women participated in every battle, every resistance movement, and that’s what I brought forth.

I said, “Don’t come and tell me that we have to depend on Anglo women’s history and legacy to tell us -- to give us a right to be involved.” We don’t have to. We have a legacy ourselves, and we have the right, and we have the responsibility to take this fight on, the gender issue as well as a race issue. Because these battles are battles on our behalf, and they’re going to benefit our community. Getting women’s ability to sign contracts, getting women’s ability to even get their phone call -- they couldn’t even get a phone line in their own name. Giving women credit, giving women reproductive health services rights. These
women’s rights were very important for rights for women in our community, to liberate them from incursions and restrictions on their rights. That’s where my writings -- though my writings were propaganda. They were not for Chicano studies. They were used -- I’m glad. We used them for training, but more than anything else, they were a justification, a rationalization, for us, that we were acting within our historical tradition, and that women had always fought for their rights within our community, and always demanded equality.

The fact that they were not recognized by governments that continued to act like colonialist government does not destroy the fact, eliminate the fact, that women have been active, and that women have gained rights under hard-fought battles. That’s how we justified our participation in the feminist movement. Then our participation in the Chicano movement was -- we didn’t need any justification. We worked just as hard and fought just as hard as the guys did. In the Raza Unida movement, party, we had a very strong, equal relationship. In fact, María Elena Martínez was elected chair of the party. She was the first woman to chair a political party in Texas. She chaired the Raza Unida Party statewide, before the Democrats ever did, and
they were like, oh, my God. They looked at us and they saw what we gained, and they learned from that and they became more progressive. The other issue that -- the gender issues, other things that we did that I thought were really, really, really good was to establish -- in 1974, I established the Mexican American Business and Professional Women’s Organization, MABPWA -- Association. That had a great deal of members, and under MABPWA, we were much more radical.

It sounds very conservative, because we wanted to incorporate -- this is how we managed to have an umbrella organization that would unite women in Austin, that had been Raza Unida. In ’74, Raza Unida was full force, and that were Democrats and maybe even some Republicans. This is how we, all Mexicanas, came together to work on women’s issues locally. So because a lot of our women were not where Raza Unida was, we gave it a very conservative-sounding name: Mexican American Business and Professional Women. We included women of all -- working-class women -- in fact, I would say that 60 or so percent of our women were working-class, and the other 40 were management and professional-class. We had some doctors in there, doctorate persons. It was an umbrella organization that
worked on women’s issues specifically. We made a lot of gains in incorporating women into their political party of choice. This way a way to heal any divisions that might have been created when Raza Unida got away from the Democratic Party, because it brought Democrats and Raza Unida -- there were still some suspicions, but it brought us all together, locally, to work on gender issues. I never thought about it until now, recently, that this was really an ingenious way of healing and making us more successful locally.

So our organization, better than any other white women’s organizations, was widely successful in solving problems and instituting programs that have been lasting. The three that I’m -- well, there’s four that I’m really, really -- five or six -- that I’m very, very happy about. One was a Medical Assistance Program, the MAP program that has been integrated into Central Health. We designed and instituted that program through the city. This is a program that did not exist in any other city until recently. Medical Assistance Program. It was a program to provide, through the city health department and the county health department -- city of Austin and Travis County health departments -- to provide low-cost and free services to people that were
on Medicaid, and, more importantly, people that were not on any Medicaid or any kind of insurance. So it provided public health access to working poor and disabled people, and others that did not work, that had no jobs, but they lived here in Austin, they paid local taxes, of course -- everybody does -- and they could participate in these health programs. They were amazing. There were clinics all over. Never in any other city.

I based the model -- first of all, we had some great professional health -- women that worked in health professionally, as nurses and others, like [Diana Juarez?], and we had [Adele Gonzales Freeman?], and they were amazing leaders that designed the program. I also designed it over -- or help -- after the program we had in El Paso, that was a program of public clinics where kids could take their consent forms and get their vaccinations and get health care and all that. Those went away when health system privatized in the US. They took away the public health infrastructure, and people don’t remember that, when it became privatized. That’s why I don’t believe in privatizing schools. They’ll take it away. Health went away, and look at the problems we have. So we instituted a public health system. The only city in the state to have
that, and our organization did that, the Medical Assistance Program. It’s now incorporated into Central Health. We always have to monitor to make sure that these idiots don’t take it away. You know? We also did the research and got the funding for the first rape crisis center. Anglo women didn’t want to do that. It was too hot. Nobody wanted to report rapes. The police -- we had to convince the police, and we had to convince the priest and the ministers, to work with us and help us do this.

We convinced them that it was a very important issue. We instituted that. We also instituted the first center for battered women, what is now Safe Place. We did it. Nosotros. The reason we did it is because when we were in Crystal City, Juan and I, there was a lot of family abuse, and the teachers -- bless their heart -- a lot of them were volunteers -- not volunteers, but hired from other cities and other states that were more progressive than Crystal City was. Although Crystal City was a hub of Raza Unida, it was not that progressive socially. And so the teachers were taking battered women in their homes, and that’s very dangerous to do, because the batterers could come after you, and they know where you live, and they knew where the women were. So when I came to Austin, even before I
started to study how other cities would do anonymous places, or places that were not known and that were protected and that had security, and how women could get protective orders -- because we started to do that in Crystal City. So Crystal City was kind of a little mini model for some of us to look at that. So when I came to Austin, MABPWA was a good place to do this, a progressive place to do this. We started that, and we’ll probably never get credit for it, but I’m saying it for the record, because I have the proposals that we wrote, that we started that.

That was a big, big, big, big advance for women in the city. On gender issues, we worked a lot on affirmative action, on hiring of -- as we worked on affirmative action for men and minorities, we also worked on affirmative action for women. We made sure that when there were affirmative action in hiring in place, that they would include gender as well as race. Let me tell you, we were way ahead of people like Ann Richards and Jane Hickey and [Sarah Worthington?] with regard to that, because we -- they were too busy amassing personal power to be bothered with class issues. That’s a critique that I have of the white feminist movement. We were very lucky that we were in a movement where we were
forced to be aware of our liberation as opposed to men, but also that our movement was involved in a class struggle. I think we were very lucky, because we became very conscious of the class struggle as well, and because we had many people in Raza Unida that were white, that were involved -- white radicals -- and in our women’s caucuses -- that were involved in the class struggle, like Glenn Scott. God, we had so many, I’m -- Rita Starpattern, Martha Boethell, Jana Zumbrum. I’m naming a lot of local women that were activists not only in the gender struggle, class struggle, but also in the LGBT struggle.

So we also became involved in LGBT issues. My critique of white feminists is that they were too -- they were like the men. A lot of the men in our movement were too involved with amassing personal power to be bothered with the different segments of liberation that needed to occur. And the white women were that way, too. They were too involved with their personal struggles sometimes, their personal amassment of power, to be aware or wanting to be involved in class issues of their own people. I’m not talking about involved in our issues. We didn’t need liberating. But there were a lot of white women that needed help, and need help today, and are not getting it. We were involved in --
this Medical Assistance Program wasn’t just for minorities. It was for everybody in the community. The rape crisis center, same thing, for everybody. The center for battered women, for everybody. We took care of everybody, and that’s where our gender activism benefited the women’s movement a great deal. We also were the ones that convinced our minority legislators to be champions for the Equal Rights Amendment. Raza Unida Party had a platform on the Equal Rights Amendment, and we worked with the men.

We didn’t have any Raza Unida men in the legislature, but we had Gonzalo Barrientos, and we had other men -- well, first Raza Unida women, and then later, through MABPWA, we’d make sure that these guys remained involved in protecting the Equal Rights Amendment. Texas rescinded later. Nobody raised a peep. But they can’t rescind it, anyway. It was already voted in. But it was voted in because we pushed and we promoted the Equal Rights Amendment, which is very far -- which is an amendment we need in the Constitution, because these people are constantly trying to overturn the legislation, like reproductive health services, that is provided and covered by the Constitution. But if we had an Equal Rights Amendment, they couldn’t overturn all these laws that they’re trying to overturn. Anyway, we worked on
gender rights through MABPWA. We also worked in gender rights through the cultural institutions. As we worked in cultural institutions on developing La Peña, which was wonderful. It was mostly oriented to the LGBT community, but it serves everybody. The Indigenous Women’s Network, Mexic-Arte. We’d make sure that institutions developed by women were supported and continued to have our support. We did a lot to support women artists whenever they needed to make noise and activate for their inclusion.

We did -- through MABPWA. Then, later -- well, I’ll talk about Hispanic Women’s Network. And MABPWA was never -- it helped women professionally and in their careers, but it was never a careerist organization. It was always an organization that was an activist on behalf of gender rights, and specifically, foremost, with a principal objective, the rights of minority women, of Mexican American or Latina women. But covering everybody, too. So that was our contribution, and we continue to support women -- and we supported the establishment of women’s studies at UT through MABPWA, and also the establishment of Chicana studies courses. That’s what we did. In that respect, we continue -- we don’t have MABPWA anymore. We have the Hispanic Women’s Network. But it’s a big disappointment.
That was developed in the 1980s, primarily by Democratic women that were not very progressive. The Hispanic Women’s Network does do scholarship fundraising, but they are not as -- they’re not very progressive. They’re a careerist organization. They are not an activist organization or -- they’re a careerist organization. They are not trained to be involved in civic matters. They are not very conscious of civic activism, and they think that civic activism is the same as partisan activism, so they’re very stupid that way, because they should know better, because they’re supposed to be professional, but they don’t bother to educate themselves, and the leaders don’t bother to educate them.

I was really disappointed when the Hispanic Women’s Network tried to be competitive with MABPWA. I was one of the founders of the network, and I was against their becoming a nonprofit right away. MABPWA was never a nonprofit. Mexican American Business Professional Women was never a nonprofit. It was always membership and activist. The Hispanic Women’s Network became a nonprofit, and because they’re a nonprofit, they use us as an excuse to not even get involved in civic affairs. When is a nonprofit -- is supposed to be involved in civic affairs, and they don’t.
So they’re a nonprofit that is very self-serving, and I’m very, very critical of their work. They do do some scholarship money, but basically it’s a worthless organization.

Q: Not much change or anything?
A: No, no. They’re not about change, they’re not about progress.

Q: And that’s what activism is all about.
A: Themselves. It’s all about personal development. It’s a very Anglo model, kind of reformist, kind of like, okay, what I have is my personal position, not necessarily to be put in service of others. It’s not very Latino-oriented in culture or values or mission or vision. Maybe someday in the future -- they’re very successful. They have nice meetings, in nice places like the Domaine, but they’re very distant from social change in the community. On a positive note, I think if we have students and we have young people that -- and we have a lot of involvement by young people, thank goodness, in our various organizations, and at the MAC and in all our institutions, we’re doing a lot of training. At the MAC, we have a Saturday -- we have a teen program that is extremely active in the cultural arts and in values, missions. We have the Saturday Academy that is also extremely active, and is getting a curriculum that is
based on social justice and civil rights. So you can imagine the kind of education those kids are getting. They don’t want to exit -- started in the fourth grade, and they don’t want to exit out. So now we keep going up grades, and their whole families come. I’m very -- and I think the Dreamers movement is the best thing that’s ever happened, because the Dreamers are forced to -- the Dreamers, when you’re an activist in a movement like that, you are forced to be very introspective, and at the same, extroverted, engaged in policies that affect your life, and that makes you a very valuable resource.

I think that -- I’m going to be doing a lecture in November -- that’s why I was telling you that I was so busy. But I’m doing a lecture, and it’s going to be on reflecting back on the feminist movement and meeting of 1977, and what we were trying to accomplish. I think I’m going to focus it on remaking citizenship, and looking at ways in which our various movements -- the Chicana movement, the African American movement, the immigrant -- the Dreamers movement, the women’s movement -- have been very successful in keeping alive a different kind of citizenship that we can have in the future that will be more collaborative, and that will institute policies that are more collaborative,
and also politics that will be more productive and more collaborative. Because as we incorporate and we keep alive our cultural values -- and our cultural values, there are two competing systems. The me-too, the me -- I’m an individual, and I have these talents, and I have made this money, this way, and it’s mine to do as I please, versus what the Dreamers and others and progressive communities bring to the table -- the Christian community brings to the table -- that you have God-given talents, and you have God’s blessings.

I’m not going to make it into a religious thing, but it’s also -- one is also religious, the Protestant Reformation movement, and the other one is the Catholic, the Scholastic Reformation movement that got to a student from Stanford. I have the research on that that I had done all my life, but he put it beautifully in a book. There’s two strains that can be united into one. The Scholastic is also a Christian-based policy, or politics, that says, what I have is, first and foremost, of service to the community, to the local, to state, and national, and that’s my reward. To having a better place -- oh, I better write that down. Okay, I’m writing it down for my lecture. “To have a better community and world.” Okay, there. Más o menos.
In case I forget. But that’s what it is, and that’s what the Dreamers bring. There’s a book called Remaking Citizenship. There are several books on this. It’s just that they’re not really brought together. But Remaking Citizenship, and this woman working with immigrant women and realizing -- and her getting to learn how that model works, that model -- remaking citizenship is what she’s calling it. It’s a collaborative model. That if you work in a collaborative mode, it’s much more powerful in developing a citizenship that works to cut across race, gender, and social.

So you cut across -- citizenship. You can say that I am writing as I speak here. That cuts across to these borders. And what do we call that? Divisions of race, gender, and class. I think that’s what we’re -- and I think that you don’t start out as an activist to do that, because there’s so much that -- it’s like doing a quilt -- that comes into place in your life at the end of -- however short. Gloria Anzaldúa died very young, and I’m sure she came to that realization. You can tell in her writings. So people come -- I’m just a late bloomer. People come into realization once they look back at the fabric of their lives, and they look back at the quilt, and they realize
that this is a journey that they undertook. And that you’re always working toward that ideal that makes for a citizenship where every individual is valued and has an opportunity.

Q: Kind of to go back to the race equality and gender equality strains of activism, do you think you would have ever been able to fight for one and not the other?

A: No. No, you can’t. As a woman, you can’t. I think that even conscious men, like my husband -- I mean, you can’t. As a man, if you’re conscious, if you are lucky enough to have acquired these values that are basically Christian values, but that also go back -- because, after all, Christ was modeled after -- he was part of the Jewish Reformist tradition, and he was modeled after the goddess Sophia. So they go back in time -- the wisdom goddess -- it goes back in time, in memorial, even in the European tradition, and in our tradition. Both traditions, they go back to creation, and creation is dualism. Creation is the only way you can realize yourself, I think, as a human being, is to be appreciative of everything that goes into making you what you are. If you’re male, you’ve got female hormones. If you’re female, you’ve got male hormones. How can you -- we just happen to be two different genders, but our makeup is basically the same. My husband has always said that the
ugliness of slavery, which is the control of one person
over another, is the fact that you’re just as enslaved as
the other person that you are -- especially emotionally and
mentally -- as the person that you are attempting to
enslave. Because to enslave somebody else means that you
don’t have a concept of liberation of the human being, of
the human spirit. So if you don’t have that consciousness
of liberation, how can you be a liberated human being? If
you enslave somebody else and you try to have control over
somebody else, then you’re not liberated yourself.

So you cannot be liberated yourself if you are exercising
this kind of control. Man cannot be liberated if -- I
mean, everybody has to have that concept of liberation and
be free. Otherwise, you’re enslaved as much as the other
person, because you don’t have that consciousness. So we
all have to work toward that consciousness. So yeah, I
think that men had as much of an obligation. This is what
we attempted to do, because we felt -- and I still feel --
I feel that the most destructive thing in this world is
racism and patriarchy. Patriarchy is that thing that
expresses the most that gender bias and that discrimination
against gender. So you say racism and sexism are extremely
destructive, and they all come under that umbrella of
patriarchy. I guess your original question was, do you feel that gender -- oh, what would have been more important? My answer was that, for men, too, for them, too, it was very important to recognize that liberation had to include themselves and women, and that liberation wasn’t just for them or just for women, but that it was for both. And that both individuals had to be liberated in order to be free, to be freer, as individuals. To feel more comfortable as individuals, to be happier. So no, never was a split. It never was a split for my husband, either. He never, ever, ever -- if guys ever came to him and said, “Oh, look at what Martha’s doing. Why don’t you do something about it?” he’d say, “Hey, thank you very much. Why don’t you -- you tell her. Hey, go ahead. It’s not my job to tell her what to do.” Yeah. He never let anybody put that kind of burden on him. He thought that was stupid, period. I think that’s what has made us -- everybody has their issues, of course -- but actually very comfortable living together for 54 years. And all together, we’ve been together about 58 years, because we went together about four years before we got married. So yeah. You have any other questions?

Q: Let me look over the -- I think we covered pretty much everything we had talked about --
A: And you’re right, it did take three hours.

Q: Did it?

A: Yes, it did. Pretty much. Yeah, I thought we could finish in two, but no. You did such a great job in outlining. You’ve got to send me that.

Q: Yes, I’ll definitely send it to you.

A: You did a great job.

Q: Since you’re both an activist and a writer, do you feel like one influenced the other more? Do you feel like your activism really influenced your writing, or your writing really influenced your activism?

A: Yeah, you know what? Being a librarian, when I was little -- I was a library aide when I was in the third grade, so I’ve been a librarian since I was in the third grade, and I’ve always worked in library-related jobs. El Paso Public Library for five years, at the archives at UT for one year, at the state library doing public documents again for another five years, and then information specialist in library in Crystal City, for the college in South Texas, and then 35 years archivist at UT part-time, Latino archives. I wanted to have my name in the library catalog for 30 years -- I mean, by the time I was 30. It was just a little bit after that. So yeah, I had a personal dream of being in a card catalog, but I didn’t know why or how.
I just wanted that, because for me, it was very physical. It was like, just the idea of seeing my name in the card catalog. You know what I mean? Very --

Q: It’s something permanent.

A: Right, right. But I didn’t know. It was just something I thought would be neat. I never really seriously thought about writing until the movement -- I mean, until I saw the need -- well, actually, until we started working with bilingual ed. I was working at the Southwest Lab when I left my library job at the state library. Then I saw the need for using my skills as a bibliographer to put reading lists together so people would have access to these books and know how to get them. It was all movement-oriented in the sense that I saw bilingualism, bilingual education, as a very, very, very, very, very basic, important movement for our community, and that we needed to make materials accessible. It was wanting to reach out with the skills that I had as a librarian, and knowledge I had of materials, that first made me feel -- in real terms, not just for getting my name in the library catalog -- but in real terms that I could actually contribute something concrete, and I could put together something, and I could make lists of things and put them out there as references. I saw myself as a reference material writer, but not as a
writer-writer or essayist. So I did a lot of those lists, and they were out there, and I developed clearinghouses, like the migrant information clearinghouse. When I was writing feminist texts, I was developing directories of information for agricultural migrants to have throughout the nation. I developed about 28 directories to do that. But then, my real writing, where I had real thoughts to go into it, and real values to promote, came through the women’s movement, and the movement within the movement, the women’s movement within the Chicano movement, when we were challenged as women to logistic jobs, to just tasks.

The guys’ culture was task-oriented. Culture included their thinking and their being the big guns on political strategy and stuff like that, and our preparing the lunches and providing toilet paper and changing the children and washing the dishes. Somebody screamed to me at a conference in Houston -- I was on stage -- and said, “Get back home and do the dishes where you belong.” That kind of thing. That screaming of this idiot guy, young guy, made me go home and write a book. I decided to write a summary. To me, *Diosa y Hembra* was just a resource book of sorts. It was a written-out thing, but it was more of an outline of Chicana legacies, from the goddess tradition in
Mexico to our work in the US as immigrant women, and to what we needed to do in the future. But it was because of that, because I needed to write a propaganda piece, in a way, a consciousness-raising piece, a curtain-raising piece, for our women to take and to use, to get into a different frame of mind with regard to our liberation. But also for scholars to use -- that we still were on that plane of developing women’s studies -- and scholars to use as a reference point, as a point of departure. As a point from which they could take the legend of the llorona and work on it more.

Take La Malinche and work out the details. Take Our Lady of Guadalupe and do more. Take the soldaderas and do more. Take our labor union movement and do more, and expand on it. It was a basic text. It was a road map. I guess I would describe Diosa y Hembra as a road map. But yes, it was a movement that motivated me, and continues to motivate me, to do my more serious essays, and to do a lot of essays that then I turned into lectures. And to do a lot more -- continues to challenge me -- to do more introspective thinking about, as Latinas, what do we bring to this nation? What do we have to offer that is unique and wholesome and strong to this community in this country, and
to the world eventually? Because the way the United States defines -- oh. [Writing] You’re helping me. Citizenship has worldwide -- so see, now, I’m about impacting the whole world. I don’t have small ambitions. It’s all about impacting the whole world. Because I think it is, that the way the US defines citizenship and democracy has impacts worldwide. This is a process that kind of goes on giving in my case. I haven’t written for a while. I’ve got two essays coming out, one in [Spanish] that’s coming out of Mexico, that’s in Spanish, and then another one, a big essay, that’s coming out in a book on Chicana Movidas and how we managed the Chicanas and the women’s movement. That’s coming out from Texas A&M, and I have a big essay in there. Then I have this big lecture. I continue to write all the time. I’m always writing about [Spanish]. But yeah, my activism is always -- it’d be hard for me to write, I think, if I were not politically and socially engaged, civically engaged. What do you think?

Q: I think so, because this really influences what you want to write about. You being civically engaged really gives you a motivation to write. And if you weren’t civically engaged, you really wouldn't have much to write about.

A: Right. I think the dynamics that you have to face in a microscopic environment like Austin, actually it’s
representative of what’s happening in the nation, and sometimes internationally. I think that being involved in policies and politics and maneuverings and what happens to the community under this colonialist system that we live in helps for us to constantly -- all of us -- to constantly redefine, redefine, redefine, and try to make things better at the same time. Because you don’t want to relive the same abuse day in and day out. You want to do something about changing the dynamics. I think we got it. If you weren’t involved in that dynamic, it’d be very hard to interpret and to express it and to write about it. So we need to do that. I wish that more people that are academics were involved civically, because I think that they would have more practical and pragmatic things to say. As it is, they have to -- I don’t know how they get their ideas. You know what I mean?

Q: They research them.
A: They research them. I don’t think it’s the same. I just don’t think it’s the same.

Q: You really have to be a part of it. If you’re not a part of it, if you’re not civically engaged, then your writing doesn’t really have the meaning that it would if -- like you, that you lived it. It really has a meaning.
A: Yeah, and like I say, if people don’t write about Raza
Unida before all the founders are gone, it’s going to be really hard to deconstruct its impact, the impact that it had. As it is, for example, with the Chicana movement, it’s very hard to deconstruct the impact we had. In fact, the article that I have in this book that’s coming out called *Chicana Movidas*, that’s being published by Texas A&M, I do an actual, almost step-by-step deconstruction of the strategies that we used in organizing at the state level for the state conference, and the ways in which the white women in the women’s movement put barriers in our way, and how we overcame those barriers. Exactly what we did, step by step, to overcome that. But I can do that, because I lived it, and I managed to save -- I got the archives. I copied them from my archives at UT. I managed to save a lot of material so I could think about it and deconstruct it. But if they don’t do that about Raza Unida, you really -- there are some things that are really hard to get from secondary resources. You have to get from primary sources, from the people that lived it.

Q: This interview was great, because you were able to tell the story of how Raza Unida really impacted Texas politics.

A: Exactly.

Q: That is something that we don’t have documented anywhere else. Now we know that Raza Unida originated from the
Democratic Party, and really basically created the Republican Party.

A: Well, don’t say that.

Q: Not exactly.

A: Yeah, we gave them the idea. They could make it. But in a way -- I mean, it benefited the Democratic Party. We have a Democratic Party in the future, and we don’t let the Republicans come back, we will have a genuine Democratic Party in the future.

Q: It established the meaning of the Democratic Party, the mission, the values that we now have. Without that, who knows where the Democratic Party would be now?

A: Right. Did you have some notions of the Raza Unida Party a little bit?

Q: A little, yes. Not much, but after your interview, I’m very intrigued, and I want to go home and do some more research. I know you mentioned it’s quite hard to [get?].

A: Yeah. Well, we still need a good dissertation from a political scientist to study the dynamics and the impact. But this is just my take on it, because I worked, and after -- and somebody also needs to do some real intellectual work on MABPWA, because I thought that MABPWA was so unique in terms of providing a space -- our organization -- in providing that space where we could work well as a group of
women who were in different political parties, and also
women in a safe space so that we had moderately
conservative women, progressive women, and then very
radical women, like myself and Maria Elena and others, in
the same space and working on the same projects. And how
we also provided space for LGBT women to be there, where
that space was not in the Raza Unida Party. I concede that
LGBT community did not have as safe a space in the party as
they could have. But when we had our separate spaces, like
our caucuses and MABPWA, there was a space. That’s why we
created that intuitively.

Because I’m not saying that intellectually we figured it
out. But intuitively, we felt that all of us needed a safe
space, a caucus within the party, and then, later on, a
separate organization. Here was Raza Unida in Austin, here
was a Democratic Party, but here was MABPWA in between, to
bridge that and to get women working together. I felt that
MABPWA has not been -- I’ve tried to approach different
women working on advanced degrees to do it, and they get
scared away. They don’t really see the richness, the
meaning of it. They get turned off, I think, by the name,
and by thinking, well, maybe it’s just a civic
organization. They don’t really realize the function it
had, and how, today, you can see the results, because women are still very united. Our unity came from that base, that base in MABPWA. That’s where we still stay united. I can still call my collaborators. We bring young women in. We still have fabulous working relationships with all of these women in different organizations. We can come together and protect our institutions, which is what we’re called on to do more and more. I haven’t gotten a taker yet. And also a serious taker on Raza Unida, because I think those dynamics are not -- nobody really thinks about it. Everybody just wants to beat up on Raza Unida, because they say, oh, it’s their fault that we have the Republicans in charge here. Listen, we had the Republicans in charge in the Democratic Party, and we had no Democratic Party. So they just happened to move out and called themselves Republicans. They were all Democrats. I’m glad you understand that. You’re such a smart kid.

Q: I don’t know if you have anything else you’d like to add to the --

A: No, I think you did a beautiful job letting me rattle on. You really maximized our -- I am so impressed with the work you did with that very -- look at all you got out of that short phone discussion. You’re really focused. You are really focused. So what do you want to do in the future?
Q: Right now -- I don’t know if I should probably --
A: Yeah, turn it off.
Q: Thank you so much for the interview, and I’ll stop the recording here --

END OF AUDIO FILE