

Interviewee: Black, Yolanda Navarro

Interview: March 28, 2006

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
CENTER FOR PUBLIC HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

YOLANDA NAVARRO BLACK

Annotation

Since the 1960's Yolanda Navarro Black has been a long time social and political activist in the Mexican American community while maintaining a family restaurant business, Los Arcos. She has also continued a drive to provide shoes for school children. As a result she has served on several governmental boards as well as non-profit corporations that serve the community.



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Interview with: Yolanda Navarro Black

Interviewed by: Ernesto Valdes

Date: March 28, 2006

Add: 1005 St. Emanuel, Houston, Texas

Transcribed by: Carol Valdes

EV: Okay, this is Ernesto Valdes, it is March 28, 2006, at approximately 2:00 PM, I'm speaking with Yolanda Navarro Black at her place of business, located 1005 Saint Emanuel in Houston, Texas. [Speaking to the interviewee] I've explained to you what this oral history is about, and that it will go into the archives at the University of Houston and you just signed this release for me. Okay. Can you let us have your full name, please?

YB: Yes, its Yolanda Y-o-l-o-a-n-d-a, Black is my maiden name, Navarro married name, N-a-v-a-r-r-o.

EV: How did you wind up with Black, is that just your father, or your?

YB: No, well actually my father, my father's mother is Scottish and married a Mexican, and in Mexico they leave mother's name last. So my, so my dad instead of being, actually Adalid is the, if it were to be my you know grandfather's...

EV: Adalid?

YB: Adalid, A-a-l-i-d. But anyway so, he put Herbert Black, and so I was Yolanda Black.

EV: Where are they from in Mexico?

YB: Uh, from Medico City.

EV: This is your grandparents?

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YB: Well, on my father's side, yeah, uh huh. My grandmother is on my father's side, paternal is from Scotland and she married a Mexican, they lived in Mexico City. On my mother's side, I guess her grandfather was from Spain and her mother from Mexico.

EV: You were you born here in Houston?

YB: Yes, I was born in Houston.

EV: And you got all of your education here?

YB: Yes.

EV: How, how far did you go in school?

YB: I went to the University of Houston. In fact I went to night school, so I went for like about nine years.

EV: Did you?

YB: Yeah.

EV: What did you get a degree in?

YB: I got a yeah, a B.B.A.

EV: Did you get married right after that, or during that, or...?

YB: Actually I started going to...I graduated from high school in '64, started going to a school. I went for just one, one term, full term, for a semester, took a full course and that was probably in '67, got married in '68, and graduated in '72. In fact my son was born in July and then I graduated in August.

EV: Where, where did you go to high school at?

YB: I went to Incarnate Ward. I went to Our Lady of Guadalupe School, and then I went to Incarnate Ward Academy.

EV: That's how you use to call me the Catholic I was raised as [??]

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YB: All right.

EV: Okay, and you uh, you have one child?

YB: One child, one son, uh huh.

EV: So...what did you start doing, career wise? Were you working when you were married?

YB: Uh, yes I was working, in fact, let me see...I graduated in '64, started working like right after school, right after I graduated, for this man, Mr. Rivera, and it was called Colonial Iron Work, and they were right down on Northside on Cochran. So I started there like you know to kind of to help him out and stuff like that. I worked for Texas Employment Commission, and uh...I went to Exxon while I was going to school, and then when, and then when I graduated I thought, well I can, I can get a job at Exxon right, and get a degree, so that never happened. But I uh was recruited with, with called RTP. It was a national organization, recruitment, training program. It was a woman's bureau out of Washington D.C., so I was recruited with them...it was at that time where a lot of companies were needing to, to you know to hire a minorities. So I was able to get with Southwestern Bell, and that's how I got on at Southwestern Bell, and I started in management. So, that was in '74.

EV: What, did you apply at Exxon?

YB: Oh, yeah I applied, yeah to get...

EV: And they did, wouldn't hire you?

YB: No, nada, nothing happened. As usual.

EV: Yeah, yeah, they were real good about that. Um, you stayed, and what did you say when you started with the telephone company?

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YB: And what now?

EV: And when did you in fact start with the telephone company?

YB: In '74.

EV: And, and you stayed until...?

YB: I stayed like twenty, I stayed there like twenty, twenty three and a half years until 1997.

EV: And you ended in what position?

YB: Well, its what we call a second level job, and so...but it was a good company, good benefits, good salary, and I was you know by then, I started in '74, divorced in '77, so as a single parent it was good that I had a good job.

EV: Oh yeah...When did you start getting active in the community?

YB: Well, really I started getting active just in terms of like in 1960 during the [John F.] Kennedy campaign because my uncles were real involved. They were plumbers but they were involved in unions, and they were in, uh you know at that time, in terms of getting out the vote, etcetera, so um, I helped during the Kennedy campaign 'cause I remember I got an invitation to the inaugural.

EV: Oh, did you really?

YB: I got all excited at sixteen, or whatever, whatever age I was then. And uh, so that was probably the, you know the beginning part, and then I got involved in somewhat with the Women's Bureau and trying to do some programs where we were trying to do surveys to help women in terms of their status, economics, and job development. And, I don't know how, but I was also with the womens'...the National Women's Political Caucus, I think during that time in the 60's they had their national convention, I was

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involved with that. And then at one time there was, and I don't remember where I met her, but it was Lupe Angiano, and she was out of San Antonio and I forgot the name of the organization that she was involved in. And so um, I was involved in her organization too as well.

EV: Okay, so you attended that that woman's conference that was here in Houston?

YB: Yes.

EV: Did you go to the inaugural by the way?

YB: No. I was too young and too poor to go. But it was just nice to get that invitation.

EV: Yeah. Did you keep it?

YB: I'm sure I have it somewhere but I...yeah...

EV: So was that your primary activism – was your first interest gender or was it Mexican American involvement within these movements?

YB: Well probably, the other thing too, how can I forget that, is that both my husband and I, when my son was only like about four or five months old, we went to La Raza Unida, a national convention in El Paso, I think. So uh, that was probably also one of the, you know, big things that we were involved in that too, so... um, I would say probably you know, as time progressed I mean, my actions were related more to Latinos in the sense of being involved in the community and just seeing what was happening, I had more knowledge of those issues than probably others.

EV: Did your company ever give you any trouble or sit down and talk to you about your activism or anything?

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YB: Uh, no not really, not really. I think during that time, I mean, I suppose it wasn't at the point where it was highlighted in the media, and so forth, to say, "Hey, we need to quit doing that."

EV: Yeah, so I guess you kept a steady flow of being involved in the community ever since then?

YB: Yes, I mean... I just, I guess the longer you live and the more [become] involved in people then say, "Oh Yolanda will be good for this," or "Yolanda will be good for that," so through the years I guess probably the first city wide appointment was when Mayor [Bob] Lanier appointed me the Houston Parks Board. That was like twelve or thirteen years ago, then I later on, I was appointed by Mayor [Lee] Brown to serve on the board of Metro. Then recently Mayor White...I'm serving on the Land Assemblage Redevelopment Authority, "L.A.R.A.," which their hope is to build affordable homes and buy lots throughout the city. So, uh...but, I've served on different, I mean just about so many different boards, you know. I've been involved in L.U.L.A.C., with the Hispanic Women in Leadership, with the park people, with...Interfaith Ministries. I mean through the years the Girl Scouts, gosh, so many, and I'm still involved now with the Center de Corazon, which is on health issues. I sit on the Houston Parks Board. For a long time, we've been doing this [opening her arms indicating her restaurant business]. The organization that we've formed, is called "The Navigation Area Business Association" that I and some others formed when we had the other shops at The Mercado, and then from there it progressed to every year we get the shoes for kids. So we've been doing that for like seventeen eighteen years, so...

EV: Well let me ask you, what did you do with the, with the parks...

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YB: The Parks Board?

EV: Uh huh.

YB: Well the Parks Board's main mission is to secure, uh, uh property for parks to develop parks, to raise money for the parks. So I mean that's really what the board does.

EV: They were a little slow doing that, weren't they?

YB: Yeah, but we're getting better now.

EV: Are you still sitting on it?

YB: Yeah. So, its been a while.

EV: And uh, and so at Metro you were a board member there?

YB: At Metro I was appointed by Mayor Brown. I probably could have stayed longer, but you know again after a year I just, you could not run for office and serve on Metro, that was one of the civil statutes or city statute, so I decided to run for District H. And so I stepped down after a year.

EV: All right, and then uh, explain a little bit more about L.A.R.A.

YB: This Land Assemblage Redevelopment Authority was actually formed right when Mayor Brown was leaving. And its sort of a, it's a combination of the City of Houston, Harris County, and Houston Independent School District, and so uh now with some legislation that was done in the state, uh, there are a lot of vacant lots and so we have the ability now to go to you know public auction if we have to and see if we can secure lots. Right now the focus is on Fifth Ward and Third Ward, and so the point is to buy as many lots as we can and, you know, and either fund it through our community development or through federal funding. We're just now in the process of taking the requests for

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proposals from builders, so we can build affordable housing. So, that's really the intent of that board.

EV: Is there some minimum amount of land that you look for like contiguous land I suspect...

YB: Well, we hope to get as much contiguous land as we can but there are some lots that might be here and there scattered, but you know there are so many in the Third and Fifth Ward particularly, and I think that's why they were originally picked. So um, so I think at this point uh, as of our last meeting we had two hundred and forty seven properties right now, not contiguous, I'm not sure how many of those are. But, uh so, the mayor was at the last meeting and he was hoping that by the, I think he said that by the end of the year we could see that we're start building some homes. And he wants to make them to the point that not like maybe one hundred thousand or something so where people can afford them but they're still quality homes.

EV: And they're, these aren't necessarily just uh, they're low income or low-end middle income type homes?

YB: Well, I mean I'm sure the criteria is going to be, yeah for...

EV: I mean they're not like the projects or anything?

YB: No. No.

EV: Okay.

YB: It's home ownership.

EV: And these homes will be owned by the city or something?

YB: Home ownership.

EV: You'll transfer title to them?

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YB: No. Yeah, we'll transfer title to the, I mean they'll transfer title to the, to the owners. Yeah, so that's a good thing. It's just taken a while, its just, we've been doing this, I mean we're at the point where we are now after three years.

EV: During all this time you, you had an import export business too, didn't you?

YB: Well, actually no I did not, but what I did was I had a shop at the Mercado where we were doing Mexican curios and ceramics and so forth, so, you know we had that there for, 'til...

EV: We being [who]?

YB: Well, the "we" being my mother helped me...it was just the family. So, I mean we were there but needless to say the Mercado was another, another story, so it closed down.

EV: Did you take part in that lawsuit against that ...?

YB: No. Well the [] took part, the lawsuit was Arturo Ramirez, the main ones Macario Ramirez, and uh I think Davila. And they were really the only ones, I mean the others did not, so.

EV: You know I still have my plates and stuff.

YB: You do?

EV: Yeah.

YB: Good.

EV: I need some pieces though.

YB: Oh really? I have them stored somewhere.

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EV: Were there any specific issues that you...I mean you've told us that you pretty much were involved across the board in parks and all that, but do you have any special things that you like to keep being involved in like education or health?

YB: Well probably yeah at this point, I mean I'd say that, the health issues...what I'm involved in, and on the educational side, I mean, you know, to me that's such an important factor, but I will say that I'm not involved in any particular component, it's dealing with educational issues. But I guess and the other part that I've always, you know, tried to...I use to serve, by the way, also on the Greater East End Management District where they tax the businesses in certain communities, and so their point is to help in terms of either security and landscaping to improve areas. So I served on that like two or three years.

But economic development...you know, I've always believed that that if you can give people jobs, you know we've talked about raising the level you know of economics, or the level of incomes that people have, and I've always believed that whether it's the city, the county, or even nationwide it's the way that you help people, and low income people and minorities is that you provide jobs. So, I really feel strongly about economic development too. I don't know, I don't think enough is done in that regard, so. I mean it's kind of a little bit of everything I suppose.

EV: Um, so you've been involved in a lot of these, primarily local groups I take it right?

YB: Yeah, yeah.

EV: Have you served on any national boards of any type or statewide boards?

YB: No, no I never have.

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EV: Okay, so were you or are you involved with any of the International Hispanic Women, or remember that thing Mrs. [Hillary] Clinton had some time ago...about uh, that was international [women's] thing, and they had China I think?

YB: Right, yeah, um, no I think that they had some international women's conference or something but that one was in Mexico and I think some of the you know some of the woman that you know, like Sylvia Garcia, some of the elected officials, you know Latinas went to that, but um, no I have, I mean no not really.

EV: Um, let's go back to the 60's.

YB: My favorite years.

EV: Yeah. Do you see, what do you see is different, at least in the Hispanic community, community since then?

YB: Wow. Well probably I would say that there is a, there has been some economic development that has allowed more people in terms of having businesses, I mean the Latino community I guess one of the things that you see is that there is a drive to, to have your own business, and um, there's so many avenues of businesses that are easy to do from the standpoint of its easy to open, you know its, its hard to keep it running. Its easy open; you know, a Mexican restaurant, easier than most things. Its easier to sell tortillas or you know the import or export, if you come from Mexico, maybe that's more accessible for you to do. So I think in regard to that, there's been more economic development. I think from an educational standpoint, I don't think we've made as much progress as we should have since then in terms of the percentage of, of Latinos that graduate from college and Ph.D.'s or Masters and so forth. Um, I think that unfortunately, everything comes full circle...that after the 60's there was a drive, there

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was more of a unity of a of people driven on the issues that affected us so much. And uh, the Caesar Chavez issue, the voting issue, so those things, a lot of people that come together and unify, and so then after progress is made in some regard, then maybe you now the late 70's early 80's you know the boom bust or whatever and people and people then had to start worrying about their own selves and their own incomes and so you know the national issues or the issues that really allowed us to get where we were kind of like were not as effective as they use to be in terms of getting people together.

So, I mean that I think it's unfortunate, its like everything, if you don't follow up if you don't continue to bring the people together. I mean the issue of voting, I was at a point where those issues were so important that you, we really got people out to vote and all of a sudden people stopped voting. So maybe like issues of today, of immigration, about health issues, about you know the war, will make people vote, you know will make people more unified and you know Latinos. I think that the melting pot thing became such, oh I guess, um, the melting pot was not an issue anymore, is that Latinos then started feeling like they were more American as opposed to having the rights that every American should have.

EV: Well you know that melting pot idea has pretty much gone by the wayside. Because a lot of social scientists, let me get your views on this, a lot of social scientists and historians will say, "Well, you know the melting pot really means how much like us are you willing to become?" And then we're accepted as the melting pot, but the melting pot doesn't go the other way except in terms of food or picking up a word here and there, but its really how Anglicized can we become determines the melting pot, not the other way around. Its not a two way street.

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YB: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

EV: What are your views on this, there's some talk about the fact that uh, matter of fact the guy who told me this put it this way, he said, "the Hispanization of Houston is becoming very strong, but no one really wants to talk about it. It's almost like having a crazy aunt in the house...everyone knows she's there but nobody want her to come out."

YB: Yeah.

EV: So what's the groundwork going to be for this to happen, or is any groundwork is needed? I mean we assume, a lot of people assume I guess, that because it's Hispanic, its going to change the whole city, but it's not that way at all.

YB: No it isn't.

EV: I mean its bound to change the city in some way, but it doesn't mean we're going to slice off [] Mexico.

YB: Exactly. No.

EV: So uh do you see any of that around you, uh do you see any kind of a general rising of people, interests, businesses in the Hispanic community where they will become that type of a voice, or that kind of a power in the city?

YB: Oh, yeah, I mean I see quite a few of them, but unfortunately you get so involved in your own personal gain, and your own personal wealth, and your own personal agenda, I guess, that unfortunately in many cases that doesn't become um, sort of a, these companies or these people do not become the trainers or saints, or expand and say you know like they say in the communities of of Asians, the communities of Indians or whatever where you know, where there's ten families and every year one family gets the twenty thousand dollars that starts your business, so for, so I mean I think that sometimes

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in our community that that um, we just keep what we have and we don't share it and so we don't allow more Latinos and more Hispanics to be part of that big process where you know, of the top one hundred companies in Houston that you know 50% would be Hispanic. You know it's unfortunate, but it could happen but it won't happen.

EV: Uh, because of that you mean? because of people being self involved and not paying attention, or because of what would you attribute that [] to?

YB: I would, I would probably be safe that everyone struggles to get to a point in life and so then once you get there and I guess, I'm not saying that you know that they don't contribute, I'm just saying that um, that there's not, maybe some either group or some form of a coalition of you know say the top twenty Hispanic companies in Houston to say, "Well, you know we're making twenty million and so why don't we make sure that um that 35% of our you know work of our force is Latino. Why don't we make sure that we mentor you know five college students a year. Why don't we make sure?" So I mean there's not like an agenda that allows you know future growth based on the you know success of the Latinos that we have here in Houston.

EV: Have those type of things been tried, that you know of?

YB: No, I don't even, I've never even heard of them which is, I mean, but that's I mean, to me would help a lot. I mean I think that um, you know if, if a company is making you know whatever millions, twenty million and stuff and you know you have five organizations, I mean five companies, or five families that are doing it and they came together, I mean they're weight in terms of, I mean bottom line this country is based on economics, so I mean bottom line is I mean if you can do it through economics that's like I said, you know job growth, job development. You know then, once you have that then

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the person that is worried about you know whether they're going to eat or send their child to school, once you have that basis of "Oh I can feed my kids, go ahead you can go to school." Otherwise then, you know that's why a lot of kids don't go to school 'cause they're making them go to work. Anyway.

EV: Um, something that I forgot, before I get to far away from, I didn't ask you exactly what your, what your position is now, with your job, your company, uh the name?

YB: Well now um my son and I are owners of Villa Arcos, the best breakfast tacos in town, or maybe Texas, or maybe the United States, and we've been here twenty-eight years. So, that's really mainly what I do now, I mean I hope that maybe in a couple of years I can kind of you know semi-retire or something.

EV: Yeah, and how many restaurants do you have?

YB: Well, we have that one for twenty eight years and then uh a year and a half ago we started this little Arcos Express and everybody thought I was crazy 'cause its in the, which was a thriving at one time China Town area in Houston, but it's um close to downtown, and its inside a market, its called Kim Hung Mall. So, we've been here a year, and you know its slow, but it's starting to come together because this whole area is changing.

EV: I'm sorry, how do you spell Kim Hung?

YB: Uh, K-i-m, H-u-n-g, Mall.

EV: Now, on to politics. Do you remember back in the 60's that we had a city council was made up of councilmen who ran at large, did they not?

YB: Yeah.

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EV: And then they were broken down, we had so many at large.

YB: Right.

EV: Wasn't that the lawsuit that Moses [Leroy] filed about with the voting with the Justice Department?

YB: Well I don't know if...

EV: Oaxaca or Harris County?

YB: Uh well, the one that I know that was part of it, of course was Fermencio Reyes in the redistricting, but here locally, now I don't was it Moses Villaponda from?

EV: No it was that African gentleman that [] filed a lawsuit [].

YB: Yes, yes I know who you're talking about, but it doesn't come to mind right now.

EV: Oh I can't remember his name.

YB: But yeah.

EV: So, uh and that's, that's pretty much set, is that what set you into, you ran for first at large, is that correct?

YB: Yes, in '97 uh huh.

EV: And uh, what was that, I mean what got you set off on that? Did you uh?

YB: Well, you know when uh, maybe naïve, or maybe you know a Pollyanna thoughts of uh running for office, or thinking that you can do the, I mean the most effective in helping people through the political agenda. So at that time um when I decided to run at large, Gracie Saenz was um term limited, and uh she was the only at large Latino there was. So in my mind I said, "Well, you know I think we should you know try to maintain." At least have one at large Hispanic on uh that, and so the problem

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that I, that I did was that you know I started late, uh like in August. The election was in uh, God I guess September, well no it couldn't have been, let me think of it...

EV: November...

YB: November, that's right, November. So one I started late, and that at large, Anise Parker has now controller was running. There were about eight of us running. And then there was a Don Fitch who was real involved in the downtown politics and so forth. Anyway, so I came in like about, which really wasn't too bad, I came out either fourth or fifth. But, mine was more like to make sure that a Latino was running, and a Latino had the potential to wind that seat. Of course Anise Parker won, but in any event that was kind of what got me really wanting to do it. So.

EV: Uh, were you, were you able to uh raise enough money to, to get you through the campaign or ...

YB: Well you know I really did. I was just um for that short time period we raised, you know we raised a good little chunk of money to you know uh, to um at least pass the word out, because at large, I mean nowadays at large position I mean and now could run, it's from five hundred thousand to a million dollars to run for at large. At that time I don't remember how much money we raised but I think it was, it was good, it was you know a good learning experience.

EV: Did you um, and then you ran in the next election?

YB: In the next election it was District H, Felix Fraga was term limited, and uh I really again felt well God, that's where you know I grew up and so forth, and uh so I decided to run. Now granted you know all during that time I lived in southwest Houston even though all my efforts and stuff were in the east end. So anyway I moved back prior to the

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six month limitation or the other requirement to be in in the district. But then, then and I felt that given my commitment to the community over the last twenty five years, that I'd get the support of you know the Democrats, and I did get the support of all the elected officials which was good, but unfortunately, what happened there was, Gabriel Vasquez came in into the picture. He had only been in Houston for maybe three or four years, was on the school board for H.I.S.D., and somehow I guess some of the Tejano Democrats and others decided he was the chosen one. So I mean, so we split in that regard and another thing is that because I was supported by elected officials, some of them certainly had a um, I don't want to say, well maybe not a vendetta, but they really were trying to get to Gabriel Vasquez. So they did a lot of uh uh negative campaigning that I was not involved with prior to me. In the runoff I came in first, and Gabriel came in second. But anyway, so there was a lot of things that um happened that I lost the race. But you know you live and learn and so of the Tejano Democrats, uh Janie Reyes, Frumencio Reyes, who I supported for years and years, supported Gabriel and so that group supported him even though I had the elected officials. And they all went [] with me and so forth, but Gabriel had I guess he was smarter about where he knew where to get the votes. And so, so he won.

EV: You get, I'm sorry you said he got Frumen to represent...

YB: Well, Frumencio was, was part of the Tejano Democrats, and Janie Reyes, and um, they were able to get the Tejano Democrats to support Gabriel Vasquez, as opposed to me.

EV: Okay. And um, let's see, did, did you, have you considered running again since then?

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YB: People ask me uh quite often, and now with you know the dynamics of the controversy at city hall and so there's been some I guess speculation people say that I should run again, but you know you get older and you kind of you know bid to run and you have your priorities are, and then you see how the politics work and what it takes to, to be in office, and how now its more run in terms of developers and who gives you the money and so, um I think that I probably, I would say that I probably would not run because I, I, it's changed so much in terms of what the agenda is of politicians is unfortunately. And maybe it you go in with you know with good cause and it just changes.

EV: You talking about land developers or

YB: Well, any kind. Anybody that contributes to you that has a vested interest because of contracts with the city.

EV: All right. And uh, do you, do you think that over this period of time that the Mexican American vote has come to mean anything then in view of this what you just told me?

YB: Well, I think ...

EV: Is it a viable, is it a viable block of votes?

YB: It is not a viable block. And then of course people will tell you different things, and they say well you know you just can't say because you know we're scattered through out the whole city so they only target like um, when they say how many Hispanics vote, they only target Magnolia and Second Ward and so forth. But I mean over all it doesn't matter. I mean Hispanics are not voting. I mean just in the experience that I had in running for office, you know we'd knock on the doors and say, "Come out and vote." I

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mean people do not train their kids to vote. People um don't see any reason to vote, and so it would take, it takes some kind of a national issue or something that really gets to you that people say, "Well you know what this time I'm going to vote." And I would say that probably students, I mean very little, very few people between the ages of say twenty to thirty five vote.

EV: Well let me ask you this, did you, uh I assume you talked to some of your, you like, like Mr. Fraga and all that. Did you ever talk to him about their campaigns or what they thought about the Mexicano vote? Did they say what you said?

YB: Well, I don't know that they've said, well I, I know that a lot of 'em have said of course, that Latinos aren't voting. I don't know that they'll say the same reasons that I'll say why they aren't voting.

EV: I'm sorry, let me reword it. How did they, did they get in on the Mexicano vote, or the Chicano vote, or did they...?

YB: Well, I mean, they, they won based on the fact that it was the district that was predominately Hispanic, so it didn't matter whether a thousand people voted in that district, or ten thousand. The point is that the Latino was going to win that seat because of the propensity of the amount of Hispanic, was say 95% in that district. So I mean...

EV: So ten people showed up to vote and you win.

YB: Yeah.

EV: Okay. Yeah, it makes sense. Um, um, I don't, this is um uh the kind of a, more of a philosophical question that I have. Um, I have, I have sensed and I've notice that some of the uh rumblings that I read and hear about about have a sense that by allowing ourselves to be catergorized as Hispanic, as opposed to Mexican American, they lose the

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need special need to Hispanic hat because we are not necessarily, we we don't necessarily share a lot of the same issues, with say Cubans, or South Americans, or Argentinians, or something like that. We, we're on a whole different thing, but people lump us together simply because of the Spanish language.

YB: Right.

EV: Uh, do you sense any of that or do you have any uh thoughts on that?

YB: Well I mean I think its just based on individuals. I mean if they ask me, I would, of course I would say I'm Mexican American. You know I think that, that overall just the term itself its just, its just easier like you say, that you lump as opposed to offending someone and saying, "Oh, you're a Mexican," or "you're Cuban," or you're you know, then you say, "Oh, are you Hispanic?" So, I mean I think that, that the term itself is more to make people comfortable as opposed to about the issues. Because I mean you're right, I mean when its, there's so, you know every um, every group has you know their issues that are more important, where in one category economic development might be the thing for you know Cubans, and for Puerto Ricans its []. So I mean the term itself to me doesn't, doesn't help us, well does not apply when it comes to uh allow us to have more income or allow us to have more power, you know uh, I think its...

EV: What about opening doors, what uh um, so much of the programs that you're talking about, say federal programs are based upon the fact that uh they take consensus of various people and they say, "Okay well, Houston has this many Hispanics."

YB: Yeah.

EV: But a lot of those Hispanics are not necessarily...

YB: Right.

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EV: Hispanics or Spanish who have the great need, so the money may be channeled somewhere, may be channeled toward us, but once it gets to us its channeled into something other than Mexican American...

YB: Well, I would agree that, that the thing is what you know as far as the census is concerned, which is the one that bases you know so much of the monies you know to, to governments and entities, uh is that it would be so much better because you could define so much more, but uh if you do that then you would have, I mean I don't know whether uh other categories, would you have put uh from Asians, whether you were Korean and whether you were Taiwanese, or so I mean I don't know, but I mean I think that if if we were specifically concerned about uh Latino issues and the impact of how many Mexican Americans you have in Houston versus Puerto Ricans, I mean I think that would be important. I mean but if it was up to me, yes I would say we should you know categorize Mexican Americans.

EV: Well. I'm just, I, I'm kind of concerned I mean just from a personal standpoint, I was wondering whether or not that you see or any of the other people that I generally talk to or interview, that are Mexican Americans, whether or not they see that as a, as a coming issue, or as a problem, because um, I mean, a lot of people say, "Well, we're going to have a group pf Hispanics come," and you look out and there's hardly any Mexican Americans there.

YB: Right, right.

EV: You know, generally they're uh...

YB: Right.

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EV: uh, Cubanos, or South Americans so, and, and, and, even the Guatamatecos, you know...

YB: Si.

EV: the Guatemalans...

YB: Yeah, yeah ...

EV: we don't uh, that's a whole different...

YB: Totally different, yeah.

EV: totally different ball game, so I'm not sure that they....

YB: Well I mean I, I, I don't know I just think that people you know generally, individually um, probably don't, as far as Mexicanos or Mexican Americans, or to say Hispanics, I mean unless you want to, [] us Chicano activists from the '60s, I mean you know you are really strong and adamant about what you want to be called. But I think this day in you know our children and generations that we have right now, I mean they don't really care.

EV: Yeah. Okay, let me, uh let's go this other direction, what what is your thinking about the um uh issues of uh women in terms of the, of the roles that they're playing now compared back in the 60s? Obviously they're more active, uh, but um, have you seen, have you seen more doors open, say economically for women than there was then?

YB: I think, oh absolutely, I mean I think that's probably you know one thing. And I would say probably just women in general.

EV: Uh huh.

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YB: First of all. So when that happens then that means that all women of whatever race, you know you're going to be able to, to raise to another level or be able to uh you know have more doors open with, you know for positions and jobs, and so forth.

EV: Well, is there anything that you have seen uh, or experienced where you see that the issues of Mexican American Chicano women are, are might be different from the general uh movement of the women's movement? Uh, let me, uh that's not worded right.

YB: Well, yeah.

EV: Do, do you know what I'm saying?

YB: Yeah, I think I know what you're saying. Well I do, yes they do because it's a I mean it's a total entity in itself in terms of, of the issues that affect Latinas versus you know, women in general.

EV: What were some of those issues, what were the different issues?

YB Well, I would probably say that in a lot of cases of Latinas for instance, I mean the issue of, of childcare is that, you know was and is probably something that was very important because you'll find that a lot of them you know have been single parents. Uh, or a lot of them had to have two jobs or have two jobs. Um and um, you know issues of health are probably so much more in the Latino community. Uh issues of women's reproductive rights and that kind of thing I think are issues that Latinas probably, you know the concept of you know how many children you have and you know and Catholicism and religion and so forth have probably had a lot of impact on that too. So, there is a lot of issues I think. In terms of of jobs I mean most Latinas would probably say "Well, you know the most I can be is, you know I'm a maid or I'll be a secretary," you know so I mean there, there goes in life in terms of jobs, you know at that time were

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probably very limited, where now I mean its open, and so I think that's, I think that's helped us a lot.

EV: Well, do think that there's any type of a, a, are there issues, I probably want to expand a little bit on what you're talking about, on you're saying. Uh, specifically, these issues that you're mention, do you think that they uh, Anglo women don't necessarily have these same issues, or can they, that because, and this is not to say that all Anglos are rich, but many of them can probably, uh, or culturally be more prone to uh have other options, other options than the Mexican women have, say.

YB: Well I think so. I think that's true and I think its true just in terms of of a generations of say Anglos, for instance where you know the issue of education for an Anglo would be like a fourth generation that, you know because they're already at the level where they're already going to high school and most of them are getting a college degree, where we're just fighting to get a high school education. So, I mean that's just one example and so um, the issues of childcare, the issues of those, in other words they've already been through that. They've already passed that stage for where, you know where, where we're like ten or twenty years behind in terms of having those groups, of having that um, uh that blanket around us if you will, that, that we're not alone, that we can pick up the phone and say, " Oh, well you know, can you take care of my baby or so?" I mean its just that neighborhoods for instance, a lot of Anglos have been in their clusters of neighborhoods for years and years and years, so they can call their neighbor next door. They've got a , they've got you know childcare worked out where everybody shares. I mean, so I mean you know that's why we're behind because

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we don't have the neighborhoods. We don't have the education. We don't have, so I mean that's taken us a little bit longer.

EV: Un, do you think that maybe the cultural thing about, for example, unwed mothers not giving children away for adoption, or uh, I mean generally the family goes in and just takes the baby. I mean Mexicans take to babies like wolves and coyotes. I mean there's just no such thing as a Mexican orphan.

YB: No. Not at all. You know, what's amazing to me is that you know now with all the knowledge we have about you know uh birth control and so forth, I mean I still have many, because I have in our place we get, really, really we represent the city in terms of the diversity of the people that come in there and so forth, but I mean they'll be telling us about you know their fourteen year old daughter's having a baby. And then they wind up taking care of the baby and so um, I mean, to me I don't see any change in terms of , of people saying, "Well let me get my education and then maybe I'll decide to get married and then have a baby." So now, I mean I don't know whether its been the fad or whatever, but I mean honestly it just seems that, that if you look at or take a pole of kids, of girls from fourteen to seventeen, that are Latinas, probably 60% already have kids. Anyway.

EV: Um, and and uh, I guess and, so grandma winds up raising, raising two kids. Although I understand from the national statistics that that's probably a, a growing, a growing thing, the grandparents raising the kids.

YB: Overall, a growing thing. Yeah, but I mean you, your question was um, gosh what was your question? Given up today.

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EV: Well, I you know, we're back on the tape again, I think that there's a um, there was a time certainly when I was growing up that uh, and I saw it in the work that I did with the immigration, and that is that they just will not allow a kid to go into an institution and I suspect might come into very Mexican, that comes from, in fact I don't think that Mexican institutions have these. There are, I mean they, I'm sure there are Mexican orphanages and stuff like this but not to the degree that we have here in the United States. And and people just take these kids in like...

YB: Oh yes, and then you know really I mean if its, if they can't support them or the family you know a you know an aunt will take them over or you know somebody down the road, and say I mean its not a quote legal adoption but somehow or another someone wants the baby.

EV: Yeah. The problem is because its not a legal adoption they come over from Mexico and they can't make papers for him.

YB: Exactly.

Side B

EV: All right, uh, as much as all this that we've been talking about, the um uh women in Mexican American, do you suspect that we might ever have a female mayor again any time soon? Do you see anybody on the horizon?

YB: Uh, yes I do, I mean I think, well of course I do know that Anise Parker will run for mayor after she finishes the term for city council controller. I think that yes we will.

EV: Do you think it will be a minority?

YB: Um, probably um, not any time soon. I think that probably um, if it were to happen, probably I would say um, it might happen in you know ten years, ten or fifteen

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years, more than likely. A Latina, but I think that we would probably be closer to getting a Latino mayor as opposed to a Latina mayor.

EV: Do you, do you have any idea why, just a personal idea I guess, um it seems to me that every leader that we have gets up anything past the city position somewhere, I mean it started, kind of started with Henry Cisneros, and [] with John Castillo, they [], they got, who else they'd net, Benny Reyes and?

YB: Betty Maldonado.

EV: Oh Betty Maldonado and all that. Um, do you see anything questionable about all that or do you think it would have happened one way or the other?

YB: Well, I mean, this this has to be such a general statement in the sense that I mean I'm not a saying that anybody's guilty in terms of what happened, um but from a general standpoint I would say that you know when you look at that and what occurred and what um, what they were charged for is that I truly believe that if you look at that and if you turn it around in a different way as to how monies you know are, I don't want to say transferred but how people um maybe win a contract and so forth, I think that its, its unfair and unjust in the sense that people are charged for things that on a daily basis occur but are done in such a fashion that it is not against the law. Uh, and so I do think that um, that in a lot of cases that things that are done illegally uh, I guess is the only word I can use, um,. are probably done illegally everyday by 90% of people that are in charge of contracts and contributions and so forth. But again, um when people are charged just look at how many people are charged, I mean I think its not just you know Latinos and so forth, but I just think that its unfortunate because on the other side I will say that in many cases when minorities are elected to office, um and perhaps have not

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been exposed in the sense of dealing with um, contracts and contractors and lucrative deals that people what to talk to you and get your vote, and want to wine you and dine you, and you've never had those experiences in your life before, uh it it may be possible that you get so, so enwrapped in that, that uh somehow or another what you originally thought was just an invitation to a dinner becomes something that you've signed that's pretty much is illegal, or something to that affect. So I mean I think it's a you know a combination of of a lot of things.

EV: Politically naive? You think probably a lot of that?

YB: Yeah, you know more, not so much, well politically naïve in the sense of of the rules and regulations of politics. But also naïve in terms of how people manipulate you and how people are deceitful, and how people greedy, and how people um do not understand the dynamics of of of how humans um, humans just like to um, just watch out for themselves. I don't know mean humans, humans in general but I mean just people in general um, are sometimes so greedy that they uh, they don't care who they hurt.

EV: Um, do you think that some of these might be more of a, a certainly what you just said, you think more of that would probably happen in a sting operation, and that they're they're a lot more successful with their sting operations against minorities...

YB: Right.

EV: ...on that basis and uh...

YB: Right.

EV: ...and uh we don't really know the inside track. We don't have inside ...

YB: Yeah.

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EV: 'Cause I think that probably politics, no matter who gets into office there's always some underlying ...

YB: Yes.

EV: ...power structure that's going to accept anybody who's there.

YB: Right.

EV: Well, they do give a who the hell the mayor is, or who anybody is. As long as they can get those people to do what they want done.

YB: Yeah, yeah.

EV: Um, and and um there's been several articles in the Texas Monthly over the years about Houston mayors and how the power establishment of Houston, it doesn't really care who's in office.

YB: Right. Exactly, as long as they maintain.

EV: As long as they have a voice.

YB: Exactly.

EV: If they can a voice of one mayor A as they can to B. So they don't really care.

YB: Right.

EV: Now but, these guys are polished and they know they have the experience going in there so we get a minority in there who doesn't know about this, okay, so my question would be is that naiveté probably what gets us in trouble? Is that we don't have that underlying power structure...

YB: Well sure it is. I mean sure it is. Yeah I mean I think that it's a ...your integrity, you have to have a certain amount of your own personal integrity. Maybe if your in office but what would you do if you weren't in office...I do agree, its just not being in

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the loop, but then again, nobody allows us to be in the loop, because city politics or whatever, is only the chosen few.

EV: When I first came to Houston in the late 60's, I noticed there were very few Mexican Americans that you even saw downtown...I mean you could walk the streets of downtown much less sitting in as bank tellers...I think the only place I saw Mexican Americans were in Sakowitz...you know, where people from Mexico City would come in to shop....maybe, Foleys. Other than that you didn't see many, then all of a sudden, after 1964 and the civil rights movement, all that changed...probably helped by the oil boom.

YB: You know, one of the things I want to say about this immigration issue and about how many illegal immigrants are here, of course in Texas and Houston, we are so much closer to the border. But I always say that everything is about supply and demand in terms of economics, so now you go to places like North Carolina now and all these places, where Latinos are totally entrenched in the United States. One of the reasons they are here is because they need them, they need them in those poultry places in North Carolina or whatever because they wanted to pay them low wages, and so, they accept them, and they don't care if they don't have an education, they don't help to get an education, so for those people who are crying about how many illegals we have in this country and how the immigration laws....I think people have to decide that if this country needs the economic base of production that we have, then I think we have to make sure that these people are here and that we do support the fact that they came to help us to have the economy that we have right now. So, we would not have the kind of growth that we have if these immigrants weren't here, so it' sort of ...you're speaking out of both

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sides of your mouth when it comes to whether you want an illegal here in this country.

So...

EV: I think...of course, I'm not the one being interviewed (laughter)...I figure an awful lot has to do with...if enforced the laws they already have on the books that means they'd have to put the pressure on the big companies and they don't want to do that. Not only that, now they are about a new law about to fine these Mexicans for being here, and they don't have money anyway.

YB: I know...it's a really difficult issue overall, I just think they are addressing it in the wrong way. I think you have to....

EV: What it puts us into, I think, the general population, including along the border states and the interior have a tendency to lump all of us into that category, not that I care one way or the other, except that it hurts a lot of people.

YB: Of course...

EV: Let me ask you one other thing, are you still active in LULAC?

YB: Yeah, but I'm in LULAC Council 643, which is the Olga Solis Council. We are not active in the sense of doing a lot of things, we do some fund raiser events, but I'm still involved with LULAC.

EV: Olga was your half-sister-in-law...(laughter) and she didn't want to admit that half.

YB: She finally did after a while, though, after so many years.

EV: Is there anything you'd like to add that I haven't asked you about?

YB: No, except to say that I'm glad this is being done so that there is some history of latinos and Latinas and what we have been doing here since way back when.

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EV: As I mentioned, if there is someone else you think I should talk to, please let me know.

YB; Sure, I have some names for you....

EV: OK, just let me sign off here.

Transcriber this is the end of this interview.

