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**History of the Chicano Movement**  
**Committee on Chicano Rights**

**INTERVIEWEE:** Baca, Herman  
**INTERVIEWER:** Patino, Jimmy, Historian, UCSD  
**DATE:** [day/month/year]  
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**[1 TAPE – 80 Minutes]**

**BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 10, SESSION 8.**

**PATINO:** 2006, UCSD.

**BACA:** Yeah, we started off that we were going to get into the tribunal, but there's other information and documentation, and as you were asking I'm looking at a photo here from a newspaper article, of Bishop Chávez. There was a mass at the Memorial, before the Memorial March took place, after the conference. This was on a Sunday. And, I was just noticing that Bishop Chávez, whom I have known since the early '70s, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) was giving communion and I had forgotten about that. But, systematically what I was, what comes to mind is is that the church was one of the three untouchable institutions in our community, along with the Democratic Party, and the military, the Armed Forces. The Chicano Movement took them on since no one had ever questioned or challenged them as to how they affected our existence or our daily lives. And, they were untouchable in the sense that when you are disenfranchised, when you are powerless you have very few options. When you're thinking within the box that has been given to you, or forced upon you, however you want to see it. And, there was reasons. There was reasons, you know. The church, of course, was something that was imposed on the Mexican people, you know. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) But, something that offered, I'm assuming,



some hope, that things would get at least spiritually better for them. And, no one ever questioned it. No one ever challenged it. The Democratic Party since the '30s was the party that people saw as giving jobs, employment to the, that generation that was in the Depression. So, if we were poor before the Depression can you imagine what happened during the Depression, you know? So, but people saw Franklin, revered Franklin Roosevelt. I mean, this was the guy that set up the CC Camps, you know, the work camps and with the projects. My father worked and you know his, the whole generation. There was no other jobs. (Patino: Uh huh.) And, they basically existed and, you know, were able to survive because of those type of jobs. So, the Democratic Party was associated with Franklin Roosevelt. Somebody who was revered. And, that there "the party of the working person and of the poor people," blah, blah, blah. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) The military is looked at differently today, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) to some degree. Okay? Because, still the, in our community that it's still thinking within the box, and still a revered institution. But, back in '30s, the '40s, the '50s, up to the present, the Armed Forces, the military, was about the only institution that in U.S. society that gave Chicanos an opportunity or a break. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, people compared that to it being a just institution, you know, something that they owed a debt to, you know. There have been many older men of my father's generation, and even this generation, have said, "Hey, I would have wound up in prison if it wouldn't have been for the military. It taught me discipline. It gave me structure. It gave me an opportunity. The GI Bill (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) allowed me to go to college." And, that was one of the few institutions. So, it was understandable that they had never been questioned with people thinking within the box, or had ever been challenged. I remember like I told you at prior discussions when I first read, and when I first got involved in the Movement that I remember reading that this organization, Catholicos for La Raza, were picketing the Catholic church inside of the



church. I remember saying in my mind, "Are those guys on peyote or something?" [Laugh] I said, "Damn." I says. But, like anything else that advocates change, after I started reading what they were saying, I couldn't deny it was the truth. There was no Chicano nuns. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) There was no Chicano priest. There was no Chicano bishops. The church's position has always, had always been, "You'll get yours somewhere else, you know. Not, don't make no waves here." So, and it always served as a front, as a pacifier of, you know, for the system, you know. "Don't rock the boat. Don't get involved, you know. God will save you. Jesus will save you." So the church, as I'm making reference to what happened at the conference and speaking as an organizer, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) you deal with what's there. You deal with what, where the people are at. You yourself, because like I told you before as an organizer it's not an "I" game. It's a "we" game. You're trying to make it a "we" game. So, you've got to go where the people are at. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, if that's what they relate to, that's what you utilize to expose them or to try to get them out of that box, that thinking. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, just like you. You have, for whatever reasons, the opportunity to get out of the box and start looking at the issues or the problems that affected you and your community and people in a different light. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So . . .

**PATINO:** What role did religion play, or the church play, in some of these mobilizations that you got together?

**BACA:** You know, the, like I said initially the church was very, because of its conservative nature, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) because of the lack of Chicano nuns, priests, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) being within the institution I would say basically it had to be dragged into this moral dilemma that was starting to surface called "immigration" (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) that affected their constituencies also. You know, along the border most of the, like in San Diego county the



majority of the parishioners are persons of Mexican ancestry, (Patino: Right.) in the Catholic church. So, it was something that they had to be dragged into, but that accelerated because there was change also taking place there. Chicanos did start come in as nuns, and as priests, and they started to organize themselves under organizations like PADRE, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) and they, so it was kind of give and take. The Movement was raising the issue that the church didn't like, which was the exclusion of Mexicanos, Chicanos within the institution and the people that got in there, I'm sure, understood that that was one of the reasons why they got in there. And, they also understood that something didn't square as far as them not being involved in issues that affected their parishioners or people of the old background, the Mexican ancestry. So, like I stated, the church started to become more active as far as the moral issues, (Patino: Right.) such as the Pope making declarations on the issue of human rights of the undocumented. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Quoting spiritual passages, you know, that, you know, "We were once strangers in a, you know . . ." (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, do not, you know, "We were once strangers in Egypt," you know, referring to that. (Patino: Yeah.) The slavery in Egypt and that they, they were strangers there and they, you know, they were made slaves, and blah, blah, blah. That immigrants should be treated with human respect. So, those are some of the proclamations that were coming. Like I said, the organizations, such as PADRES themselves, and other Chicano priest organizations or individuals, and nuns were involved, yeah, in the effort, in the Movement. I remember here in San Diego there was, you know, not only bishops, now, auxiliary Bishop Chávez, but there was also Juan Hurtado, who was very, very active. Sister Murrieta. There was Maggie Castro, the, you know, the nuns from their given orders that were very, very involved, you know. That's how the Father Hidalgo Center that is no longer there came about. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know. And so, so their role was, as far as individuals, and that's very active, and as far as structure the



church did start getting involved with the moral aspects of, you know, of human rights, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) and respecting the dignity. Not to the extent that it should have, but nonetheless better than what existed in the early '70s, you know.

**PATINO:** So, some of these people from the church, like Bishop Chávez, were challenging the church and then in such . . .

**BACA:** There lack of involvement, you know, and they were lending their support, you know, like you saw, giving mass (Patino: Yeah.) to the people that were going to go march in remembrance of those that had been abused or had been killed at the border, you know. There was a Memorial March in remembrance of those who had been abused violently and those who had actually perished.

**PATINO:** Uhm-hmm. And I was interested in your comment that "You have to go where the people are. That you can't disregard the church in the Chicano community because . . ."

**BACA:** Oh, it's a fact. (Patino: Yeah.) It's a factor. It's, the thing is to get them out of the box [Laugh] (Patino: Yeah.) thinking that that's the only definitions that there are, the ones that they had been given inside the box. Same with the Democratic Party, you know. The Democratic Party likes to push that they are the party of the poor and the so-called minorities, and that they're, you know, safeguarding, you know, the disadvantaged rights, which is malarkey, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) BS. You know, but that's the accepted definition from a political laypeople. "Hey, it's the party of the working man. It's the party of poor people." You know. "It's the party of the minorities," you know. And, the Democratic Party's just like the Republican Party, right. It works on who has got the power, money, and people, you know, and anything else it can pick up to, you know, as icing on the cake. More power to them, the way they see it. And, if it takes that kind of rhetoric, well fine. But to me that's not the issue. The issue is



accountability and it's being able to level the playing field politically, to have an organized power, either money or organized people. (Patino: Yeah.) So, like I said, and looking at some of these files here, you can start seeing the formulation of the parallels or the analogies, or the analysis of like I'm quoted here as saying, "It's a slave system." I started to think about the parallels, you know, that could explain some of the establishment's charges, you know, that they were lawbreakers. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) No, it's, the lawbreaker is the system [Laugh] that has been created, just like slavery. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, not the ramifications that surround the issue, but the system itself that permits, you know, those ramifications such as, you know, people being forced, because of economic or political conditions in their homelands, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) to being forced out into a situation where that's the only alternative. "Hey, let's flee and go to the United States and, where things might be a little bit better, but let's not forget who caused the condition that forced them to flee in the first place," you know. Like, the civil war in Nicaragua, Guatemala, the economic dislocation and poverty in that, in Mexico, you know.

**PATINO:** Right. The Central America stuff was going (Baca: Oh yeah.) in the '70s, early '80s?

**BACA:** The Sandinistas, (Patino: Right.) Guatemala. You know, so those are issues that, you know, one addresses as an organizer, you know, as an activist, you know. But, you can see where you have to look at other peoples' experiences to try to explain to your own people and to the general public of, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute. You know, this is just like the slave system." (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, I can see where I had written about, or what I had read about the Afro-American experience in this country (Patino: Right.) was a parallel at least to explain (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) of how something had been manipulated, something had been exploited for very narrow vested interests, you know. So, you don't live in a vacuum, or we don't live in a



vacuum. You can't work in a vacuum, you know. There's, there are other people out there with different experiences. Some are parallel. Some are, you know, are complete opposites to, you know, to yours but there's still parallels, there's still, you know, there's still struggle, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) there's still efforts for them to franchise or level the playing field.

**PATINO:** Uhm-hmm. Analogizing the immigration system with slavery, that helps you to talk about it with the media? And, because I guess people would recognize slavery, especially in this country, as . . .

**BACA:** Yes. That and it was a round peg going into a round hole type of thing where, like I told you before, the longer you accept the definition that it's an immigration, they're going to kick your rear every time, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) because there's really no counter arguments, (Patino: Uhm-hmm. Uhm-hmm.) other than emotional ones, which are, nobody cares. Nobody cares. "Hey, you know what, they're first a lawbreaker then they're hungry. Why doesn't one, why doesn't their government do something?" you know. Versus, "Hey, you have a system here that, push and pull, that would push and pull factors," you know. Let me give an example. There's the slave system, (Patino: Uhm-hmm. Uhm-hmm.) you know. They called, that was called "force immigration," (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) you know. They forced people to immigrate and look what happened. Why, what was the reason behind that? What was the reason? Because like they used to say they were trying to "civilize the savages," you know, "because they were doing them a favor by taking, taking them out of the dark continent." See, there was rationales. Just like there's rationales now. "Hey, they're lawbreakers. Hey," you know . . .

**PATINO:** "We're doing them a favor. Everybody wants to go America."

**BACA:** Yeah. "I support a democratic government in Mexico," you know. And, "They ought to get rid of that government," blah, blah, blah. There's a bunch of rationalizations. But, like I



told you before, "Hey, they're stealing jobs." (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) "They're using or misusing our welfare system, the hospitals," blah, blah, blah. And, because we are disenfranchised, because people have to respond to what they've been conditioned to (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) you have a situation where, you know, it's like fighting with not one hand tied behind your back but two hands tied behind your back. You know, you're trying to fight but they're hitting you all over. So, that did allow, that did allow them to explain, both internally and externally, this complex problem.

**PATINO:** I'm curious too, did that analogy help in any way work with the African-American community? Was there a response?

**BACA:** Some, some didn't, they were political. Some they were progressive. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, and they themselves are in a box, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) you know. You know, if these people just left I'd have a bigger piece of bread," you know? (Patino: Right.) [Laugh] Without remembering why they didn't have no bread in the first place, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) you know, because of the historical experiences. And, you know, so hey, inastuteness, political ignorance, you know, it doesn't know any borders. Even in our own community, you know, you hear people, like I told you time and time before, they make the sound, they make the Minutemen, the Minute-mensos, sound, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) would make them sound liberal, you know. "No man, you're talking about Mexicanos." (Patino: Right.) I'll give you a particular. I was in New Mexico probably a year, year and a half ago, and stopped by at my cousin's house and they were in the garage drinking beer and there was this couple of friends of his. And, they were talking about the undocumented like the Minutemen. And, this one guy in particular, prieto, dark-skinned, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) I remember him saying that he, he's telling the story that he had been, he had gone to the bank and the teller there said, "Hola. Buenos dias."



And he said, "I raised my voice and I told her, 'Hey, what do you think I am from Mexico? You think I can't speak English? I screamed her out.'" [Laugh] You know, and then he went into the thing about, "You know what burns me up is, you know, this Cinco de Mayo, man, what's that go to do with us?" A classical case of colonization and believing everything that was told and taught to him within the box, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) but that's understandable, you know. It's not right, but it's understandable. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, this other guy was saying about, "Hey, you know, those mojudos, I bid a job and, you know, they underbid me by \$400, you know. And, hey man, you know, they're the problem." (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, the guy never stopped to think. I thought that's what capitalism was all about, you know. I thought . . .

**PATINO:** Lowest price.

**BACA:** Yeah. I thought competition, you know. [Laugh] I thought, you know, "Do they have a family like you have a family? And, maybe they want to feed their family too." But, not one word was ever said about who was paying. [Laugh] (Patino: Right.) You know. Who had put them at odds, you know? So, yeah, it, some in the Afro-American community, you know, understood that, you know, "Hey, we got nothing, they got nothing, you know, because of historical reasons," you know, they partook it at least position wise. And, you have to admit, you know, when you have two poor people going after the same piece of bread sometimes it can get real, real nasty. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Just like you're seeing now, between Chicanos and blacks.

**PATINO:** Uhm-hmm. Like when we were talking about Chicanos and Mexicanos, too?

**BACA:** Oh yeah.

**PATINO:** The same thing?

**BACA:** But, you can subdivide that into many, many, groups, you know. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.)

But, and those, or that is the reality, you know, for poor people. [Laugh] (Patino: Uhm-hmm.)



So, you can't say, "Hey, don't be hungry. Hey, don't . . ." You see the immediate. Things that are systematical are a little bit more complex. There's a bunch of barriers to finally get to what the entire picture looks like. It's like having a thousand pieces in the puzzle and, you know, you're picking up one piece at a time, and whatever piece that's affecting you that's what you're responding to, rather than after seeing the whole picture say, "Hey, now, you know, now I see the guy that's manipulating this, or this system has manipulated it or what have you." So, you're the same way. You're disenfranchised and no matter who you are you get the worst of everything. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know.

**PATINO:** Getting back to the tribunal and the Memorial March, it seems like there was an emphasis on the brutality of the INS at that time, because you're memorializing people who had been, you know, killed, or hurt, and then the tribunal, of course, where, you know, testimony from people who had been brutalized by INS. Was there a . . .

**BACA:** Yeah, the moral, the moral aspect is a very powerful factor (Patino: Right.) in any issue. I remember once reading a story about one of Joseph Stalin, the dictator of Russia, being told that the Pope was opposing his position. And Joseph Stalin, thinking in conventional terms, turning to his advisor and facetiously asking him, "How many divisions does the Pope have?" And, the advisor's saying, "He don't need no divisions. He's got something else." So, I think that sort of dramatizes the, that most people, you know, want to do right, do the right thing, you know, "Do unto others that they would like them to do unto them," blah, blah, blah, and that's a motivating force in a fight against injustice. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) That you've got something more powerful than what exists, which is righteousness, you know, the truth. So – what was your question now? Or . . .

**PATINO:** Was there a strategy to that emphasis on brutality or, you know, was . . .



**BACA:** Oh, the brutality (Patino: Right.) and the abuses, yeah. So, here was an agency that had historically never been questioned or challenged, even though everybody, everyone, especially in the Chicano or Mexican community knew of its, of its record. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, it was one of the things that, like I stated to you about the Mexican media. Their attitude in the early '70s of defining the undocumented as *traidores*, traitors to *la patria*, to the country. And, coming up with the rationale that there was jobs, and blah, blah, blah. So, it was something similar to that, that people couldn't refute what they basically knew, even though they had been conditioned. Not when you put a picture out on the table, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) the public table. So, it was, it was sort of a not only a political strategy, but it was, because we knew it was, it was a political Achilles' heel. (Patino: Right.) Because, the agency, it's a racist agency, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) [Laugh] plain and simple, you know. It was patterned after the Texas Rangers and everyone knows the Texas Rangers were the, historically speaking, were the private goons of the agribusiness and cattle barons, and of the powerful economic and political interests in Texas. Their only job was to make sure Mexicans didn't get too uppity and start to demand the same rights or the same working conditions as the so-called majority of society, the white society. Now, since 1954 that job, for us, was, as it applies to us, was given to the only national police force that this country has. This force can arrest you in San Ysidro, right here at the border, or in Laredo, or in New York, Connecticut. And, who do they arrest? Persons of Mexican ancestry. I told you. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Out of the million and some people that are apprehended every year over a million of them are persons of Mexican ancestry. So, this thing about, "Hey, we're here to protect all the borders," you know, that's bunk. That's BS. Here, especially here along the U.S./Mexico border their, their job is to make sure that the system that exists (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) works. And, like I told you before, the Border Patrol is the most incompetent agency in



the history of all agencies. They have never ever, ever stopped one person, one Mexicano, from crossing that border that was intent on crossing that border to get a job, unless they killed them, you know. And like I told you, I'll bet people that, on their, that got across on the sixteenth try. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, [Laugh] they stopped him. They delayed him. They harassed him. They abused him. But, they never, they didn't stop, you know, they didn't permanently stop him from coming across. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Because, there was other factors motivating him to come across, such as hunger, and poverty, (Patino: Right.) and no hope. So, yeah, that's, that was their Achilles heels. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And still their Achilles heel.

**PATINO:** Let me ask you, if the Border Patrol is maybe, maybe someone who maintains the system, how does violence and killing fit into that, if they want these, they ultimately, the system wants the people to come to work?

**BACA:** Well, you know, it's not discriminate. (Patino: Right.) You know, just like you didn't kill all the slaves, but you made some of them (Patino: Right.) an example of what could happen if you stepped out of line. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) You know, so you know, Texas Rangers didn't kill every Mexican in Texas but they, they had, the fear factor, (Patino: Right.) you know, had a big impact on the majority of Mexicanos that didn't want to get involved either registering to vote, or talking about the conditions of the schools, or their wages, or the condition of their housing or what have you. So, it serves it purpose, you know. It's selective violence, you know. And, no different than the police in the barrios, you know. You know, they're not there to serve the people, because really they have no connection to the people in that community. They are only there, why would barrios exist in the first place, unless they were created by conditions, you know. By vested groups that control the system. So, no difference here, you know, with the Border Patrol. It's a law enforcement agency. So, it's the only national police force that, you



know, was created specifically for Mexicanos in 1924. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, its history is one exactly like the Texas Rangers. More disgusting or disgraceful is that probably the majority of Border Patrolmen are persons of Mexican ancestry. Indian scouts. Judases. You know, they sold out the people for thirty pieces of silver, you know. Oh man, they used to brittle at the point when I used to say that, you know. But, it's the truth, you know. Mexicanos are being used to maintain a system that is contrary even to their own loved ones. But, you know, but there's always rationalizations, you know. There's always rationalization and no thinking. No thinking. So, the whole issue of abuses and violence is something that just like the Afro-American Movement, "Ya Basta, man. We're sick and tired of Jim Crow, being segregated, being treated as second and third-class citizens, and being exploited, or being manipulated," blah, blah, blah. And, that violence is something that I'm sure if I go to Texas I'd find stories to this day of acts of brutality from the Texas Rangers, you know. Same here with the Border Patrol. Not too many Mexicans haven't heard of the stories, or have been stopped, harassed, abused, you know, at bus depots, at parks, even churches, you know. By this, it is a Gestapo agency, you know. People say, "You're being rhetorical." I'm not being rhetorical. You know, there's no control, you know. Just, their job is to go out there and like I said, "For what purpose?" It's not to stop anything. They have never stopped anybody. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) As a matter of fact, they have ensured that it remains, because you know what, they are used as a force that goes in when someone starts to complain about conditions, or changing the rules of the ballgame. (Patino: Right.) You know. You know, somebody starts talking about, "Hey, let's unionize so we can get some drinking water, or our wages will go up, or our working conditions will improve." (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Hey, the employer himself will call this agency to take care of the "that problem" of trying to clean up the real problem, you know.



**PATINO:** It just seem like it's been the government's response that there's an immigration problem. "We'll beef up the, beef of the Border Patrol" is their (Baca: Yeah.) answer, usually?

**BACA:** Because the government is controlled in this issue by this secondary labor of the U.S. economy. You're talking about agribusiness. You're talking about the garment industry. You're talking about the hotel, motel, restaurant industry. You're talking about, you know, now construction because of the change in demographics. You're talking about the whole live-in maid situation that exists along the border. So, that's a very powerful sector that's represented by, you know, political figures that owe their existence to that sector. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, basically that's who's run – let's put it this way. That would be parallel to the South and slavery. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) In other words, the North is trying to get rid of slavery, whose the force, the economic and political force that, "Hey, we want it, to maintain it because it's to our advantage. It's free labor." So, there's something similar here. "We don't want to see no, or we want special programs now, you understand? Right. Guest Worker Programs, or a Bracero Program," (Patino: Right.) instead of people saying, "Well, they're workers. How come they don't have the same rights as any other worker? If they're given value, labor produces value to society. Crops come out, somebody makes a profit on that. The government gets taxes off that profit, so on and so forth. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, why are they treated, why do you need special programs?" [Tape paused] "They're illegal." "Well, who made them illegal, you know? Who made them a slave? Who brought them over here?" See, conditions bring them here. I mean, why in the hell would someone walk across a desert to be exploited? Because there's certain conditions that are worse than that, that have been created by what, you know? That's where it gets complex. Systems are complex. There's a civil war going on in Guatemala. Well, who's supporting how? And . . .



**PATINO:** Where are the weapons coming from?

**BACA:** Yeah. Where are the – what are we doing there? "Well, we're fighting for freedom. We're fighting for democracy." Blah, blah, blah. It's all the rationale, rationalizations. So, so but the Memorial March was an effort, like I said, to, as far as the CCR was concerned, to go outside of San Diego and California, but where we were predominately involved in and politicize this issue that we were certain was either occurring or it was going to start occurring, especially the residential raids that, you know, expand because remember one of the cornerstones of the Carter Immigration Plan, or any other plan, was always a beefed up Border Patrol. (Patino: Right.) So, I remember one time a meeting in Nebraska. I spoke at Nebraska State Prison. [Laugh] And, people were complaining to me about the U.S. Border Patrol pulling raids in their community.

**PATINO:** In Nebraska?

**BACA:** In Nebraska. How far is that from the border? [Laugh] You know, it's like, what is a "Border Patrol" doing in Nebraska? You know. So, we, looking back we're trying to expose or give meaning to this issue that we were certain was going to start affecting people as you are now seeing on the national level. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And the, it started to percolate because after the Memorial March there was a lot of calls regarding the issue from groups outside to go speak on the various campuses and various communities.

**PATINO:** Uhm-hmm. Was it a big issue within the presidential campaign? Because, from the Memorial March, the tribunal, Reagan gets elected afterward.

**BACA:** I wish I could say that we had that kind of impact, but we didn't. (Patino: Right.) I mean . . .

**PATINO:** I wonder if it was at least being talked about as one of the points?



**BACA:** Well, human rights were being talked about. Remember, Jimmy Carter had raised the whole issue of human rights, (Patino: Right.) in the, in a bigger context than just the immigration issue. Don't forget, Jimmy Carter had utilized Hisputnics to front, given it a softer face or a more liberal face, or politically, I guess, muddling up the water like Hispanics always do, you know. So, people start to call, inquire. We were putting out little brochures about some of the incidents that the, the really major incidents, children dying at the border, the rape that I spoke about, the handcuffed individuals, U.S. citizens being deported, so on and so forth. So people, you know, were inquiring. People were showing interest. Organizations, which starting to say, that this was one of the primary factors and the issue that had to be addressed and had to be dealt with. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, we decided that we would call a national tribunal (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) of immigration, but not only immigration, but also police, because police is police, and that's, that's basically what the Border Patrol is, is a law enforcement agency, you know, with military backing. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And . . .

**END SIDE 1, TAPE 10, SESSION 8.**

**BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 10, SESSION 8.**

**BACA:** Wanted to give it a national face. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, we invited, we invited individuals from -- let me see, hold on, and let me get into some of these files.

**PATINO:** Okay. Here's the actual tribunal.

**BACA:** Those are all immigration. Okay. Tribunal.

**PATINO:** Yeah. And I think it's like in two or three parts.

**BACA:** [Shuffling papers] Here we go. (Speaks under breath) And here's the actual -- good lord this is the actual packet that was (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) put together. From what I'm seeing here, there was testimony, you know, taken, given and taken that, you know, involved, you



know, of course use of deadly force by agents of the Border Patrol, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) abuses of children, and systematical violations of a humans constitutional civil rights of our community as per the raids and what have you.

**PATINO:** This is national?

**BACA:** Yeah, this is national. So, some of the documentation that you see here (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) were brought in from L.A., Chicago, San Antonio. (Patino: Right.) The tribunal panelist was Lupe Sanchez I'm seeing here, from the Arizona Farm Workers, Corky Gonzales, Juan Soliz from Chicago. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Gilbert Jasso the National Office of Civil Rights from the GI Forum, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) the veterans, veterans organization. (Patino: Right.) I'm seeing here Manuel Lopez, the Mexican-American National Organization California. There was Ruben Sandoval, who was a very pivotal individual in Texas.

**PATINO:** Uhm-hmm. What organization is he with?

**BACA:** He was with the Civil Rights Litigation Center there in San Antonio. (Patino: Uh huh.) And, he was, he was involved with a number of major cases that I remember. One of them was, that I saw on 20/20 or 60 Minutes, one of those national programs. And, where a Coca-Cola truck driver plowed his, there was an accident with a bus of Chicanito students in this rural town, and overnight, after the death of a number of children everyone in that town instantaneously became a millionaire. And, what I remember was, was people were talking about the impact of this money on their lives. And, I remember this old man saying that he had no more friends, that the money had changed everything and people now just used to come around because of the money. He said, "I wish I would have never have gotten this money." (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, then there was the shooting death of a policeman, I think, in Houston, playing Russian Roulette in the early '70s. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Two young Chicanitos were arrested and placed



in a car, police car, and the officer went back there and started playing Russian roulette with them so that they would confess that they were the ones that had committed the burglary or whatever they were being accused of, and the gun went off. Killed the twelve-year-old Chicanito. And, there was riots in Houston. (Patino: Right.) And, Ruben Sandoval was involved with that. Those of the educators, Victoria Castro from State President of AMA, the Education, Chicano Educators. Rudy Acuña, professor at Cal State, Historian. I don't know if I said Lupe Sanchez already, the Arizona Farm Workers. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) José "Pepe" Medina, who, Pepe now is a congressman. What is it, the PRD you know, Party, and Pepe Medina came first to California, the United States, during the massacre of the students in Mexico City. (Patino: Right.) And, there was an effort by the Echeverria government, I mean. That was the, that was the age of people just disappearing, you know, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) and people getting assassinated. (Patino: Right.) And they were after Pepe, along with other students that had to flee to the United States to, you know, from, to not get [Laugh] the zapatacos or murdered. And, I met Pepe because Casa was instrumental in trying to seek asylum for him. So, Pepe also was very, was instrumental in calling a conference in the late '70s where this national, this Bill of Rights for the undocumented, which is one of the best proposals as far as solutions to the so-called issue, where, you know, the issue of true amnesty came out, you know, about if you're a worker then you should be extended all rights and be allowed to immigrate and unify your family, and blah, blah, blah. I also, in 1981, after, yeah, after this tribunal (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) I'll get into that right now, but I journeyed to Mexico where I turned over this packet that we're looking at. A thousand page . . .

**PATINO:** Right. In Mexico City?



**BACA:** A thousand-page packet, through the Portillo Administration there at Los Ninos and then Pepe had read that I was going to be there, like I told you or like I stated before to you. We had a very amicable relationship with the Mexican media. So he had read that I was going to be there and he met me at the airport and asked if we needed, you know, a ride and some help. So, you know, he sort of guided us around.

But anyway, back to the tribunal, this was a panel, those were the issues. It was an all-day meeting and gathering of listening to testimony from individuals and local and organizational heads that, you know, brought their cases as to what was happening (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) in our community. Not only as far as immigration, but also as far as some cases of police brutality. I'm looking at an article here that was submitted from San Diego. *Badly Burned Child Denied Hospital Bed*, you know. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Let's see. Here's one from Washington D.C., from the National Coalition on the Hannigan case. The Hannigan case was three undocumented individuals were tortured in Arizona. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, there's their case. And, let's see. Here's one on the killing of an individual, I'm assuming Washington D.C. So, there's a number of documented cases with backup documentation. Okay?

**PATINO:** Here's one on the San Jose police.

**BACA:** Yeah, San Jose.

**PATINO:** In 1980. Broke in without a warrant. "Frank Lopez, Tomasa Garcia, and Angel and Evelyn Ramirez were sitting inside talking and San Jose Police entered, kicked and punched the adults with batons and handcuffs."

**BACA:** Yeah so there's, there's large numbers. It's a thousand-page packet. Here's a letter from me on children being incarcerated at the federal prison. [Laugh] (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) The MCC.



**PATINO:** At the crossing?

**BACA:** The MCC, right here. (Patino: Yeah.) Downtown San Diego.

**PATINO:** Oh, okay.

**BACA:** Here's a letter, not a newsletter. It's a telegram to President Jimmy Carter, from your's truly, stating that "Children, including babies as young as twenty-four months, are being imprisoned in the federal prison system. Children are being held at the Metropolitan Correctional Center, El Centro Detention Center, and the San Ysidro Detention Center for a period of one to ninety days. *San Diego Union's* attorney Michael Walsh, according to our investigation, claims that the arrest and imprisonment of children and their mothers is necessary because they are needed as "material witnesses" in cases involving illegal alien smugglers. These children are being given criminal records even though they are powerless over the circumstances involving their arrest. Our sources inform us that some of these children are with their mothers, but that others are being imprisoned without their parents. Our investigation also revealed that once the children are no longer needed as material witnesses the INS authorities simply toss them into Mexico without making any effort to ensure that the children are reunited with their, with their parents. Furthermore, it has also been reported to us that children who are turned over to Mexican authorities are kept for one week and then are turned loose in the street to fend for themselves. Yesterday, February 27, 1980. A twelve-month-old baby was being held at the MCC Center. These practices are inhumane, barbaric, and an indictment of the current immigration policy. In the name of human decency our organization demands the immediate cessation of the imprisonment of children and an end to all the degrading policies involved in this system. The insanity of these actions cry out for an immediate investigation to determine responsibility for these acts. As the highest elected official in the country it is your responsibility



to put an end to this border madness. Thank you, H.B., Chairperson, Committee on Chicano Rights," and like I said that's on 2/28/1980. So, these are some of the cases, you know.

**PATINO:** Right. How was the packet assembled? I guess, all over the country different organizations sent in different stuff?

**BACA:** No. This, these are documentation that was brought and presented by (Patino: Okay.) the organization or the representative, you know. We had to set it, like I said, besides dramatizing and allowing people to publicize the incidents within their communities throughout the nation, to turn the two packets over to the two governments, the government of Mexico, led by Portillo, and the U.S. led by President Ronald Reagan. So, we flew first to Mexico City, and I remember we, we got there – and remember, this is all paid by, once again, community contributions, fundraisers, what have you. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Because, we were, we sent one [Tape Distortion] [772] to Mexico City, myself, my wife, Ralph Inzunza, Carlos Vasquez, and José Berrellez, the individual I was talking about the buttons and Culiacán, (Patino: Right.) who had a very strong command of the Spanish language, you know. So, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) and who could translate. So, he went ahead because he had some relations over there and we, we got into Mexico City on, during Holy Week. We got there on Ash Wednesday. And, like I said to José Pepe Medina picked us up at the airport, much to our surprise. I mean, I hadn't seen him for a while. (Patino: Right.) And, he said he had read that I was going to be there and if we needed some assistance, you know, or a ride, and what have you. "Yeah," I said, "we do," you know.

**PATINO:** This is a couple of weeks after the tribunal?

**BACA:** Yes.

**PATINO:** Okay.



**BACA:** Probably, yeah, probably a week, two weeks. (Patino: Yeah.) I don't think it was any longer than that. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, I remember getting our luggage and Pepe was with an attorney friend of his. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, they said, "Do you have to, you guys get to the hotels." "Sometime tonight, but not right now." He says, "Well, would you guys like to stop at La Plaza Garibaldi?" (Patino: Right.) Those, that are not familiar with the Plaza Garibaldi. That's where all the mariachis stroll and, you know, I guess it's like restaurants, bars, and mariachis all over the place. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, being Holy Week it's my understanding like three-quarters of the city takes off to other parts of Mexico. So, the town is sort of like vacant, really. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, we got there, and like I always say "History is history," and I think we drank like four bottles of tequila, man, [Laugh] and we got wrecked, [(distorted)][800]. [Laugh] You know, truthful. And, I remember, I don't know how we got back to the hotel, but they got me there. But, we got back to the hotel and we were so hung over that for a week we didn't touch anything. [Laugh] (Patino: Yeah.) One of the individuals got, I guess, alcohol reaction so he had like a white herpes around his mouth, you know. [Laugh] And, I take it back. It was, Carlos Vasquez was not there. It was Ralph Inzunza and my wife, myself, and José Berrellez. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, that was on a Wednesday. I remember on Thursday telling Pepe Medina, I said, "You know, we're going to call for a press conference on this tribunal packet that we're going to turn over today. Maybe you can be so kind to take us?" He says, "No problem." "To Los Pinos on Saturday." He said, "Why don't you have the press conference on Sunday," which was Easter Sunday. "Sunday? On Easter?" I said, "Nobody's going to show up." "No," he says, "contrary. The opposite is true." He said, "Did you notice everybody's gone, nothings happening here. These guys are starving for any kind of news." [Laugh] I said, "Well, you know, when in Rome do as the Romans say, you know, or do." So, I



said, "Why not?" And, as far as I can remember that's the first and last time we ever had a press conference on a Sunday, especially Easter Sunday. [Laugh] So, we were staying at the Zócalo, which is, you know, where they raise the flag every morning, the honor guard (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) where the presidential palace is at. (Patino: Right.) We're at the hotel there, and every morning I remember, I always remembered the presidential guard used to come and put up the Mexican flag, you know, with the little bugle song and what have you. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, that Thursday we turned over to some officials, and like I said mostly everybody was gone, and we turned the packet of abuses over to the Portillo Administration. And, I don't know if you've ever been to Mexico City, but there's a lot to see. (Patino: Right.) So, after that Pepe and this attorney friend took us, gave us a tour of the Museum of Archeology. Archeology?

**PATINO:** Anthropology.

**BACA:** Anthropology. (Patino: Right.) And, extremely interesting. Extremely interesting. (Patino: Uhm-hmm. Uhm-hmm.) And, I remember this individual ranting and raving about the glory of the Aztecs and the Chichimecas and the Olmecas and the Indians, you know, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) what they had done. And, I always remember coming out of the museum after hours, you know, because this is, you can probably spend two days and not see everything. We were fortunate in that they knew the history, so we were getting like a personal tour of (Patino: Right.) of, you know, what the various indigenous tribes were and, you know, some of the things that they're explaining why they were done. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, I remember they're going on about, this one individual's going on about the glorious Indian past and coming out and seeing the Indians out there begging. And, I remember after that, that evening we went to the Zona Rosa, you know, the, I guess the French influenced part of Mexico City. (Patino: Right.) And, [Laugh] I remember the Indians also begging there and being shooed away like they were some



sort of lepers, you know. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) The contradictions, you know, they're a mass of contradictions. So, and that was on a Thursday and from what I remember that next Friday they took us to go see the pyramids, the Teotihuacan. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, I remember climbing up to the top. I think it was Ralph, and Pepe, and myself climbed up and I always remember the steps being like around eight inches, [Laugh] (Patino: Yeah.) you know, so you got to watch your step. And, you look down and this guy's explaining to us that that's what they used to roll the bodies down after they used to cut their hearts out or something. (Patino: Right.) So, I remember getting up there, you know, the 365 steps and looking out into the distance and, you know, you didn't see one rock. [Laugh] I said, "Where did they get those rocks at?" you know. But, I remember Pepe making a statement that, something to the effect that "This is our strength. Nobody has ever been able to duplicate it. These pyramids are larger than the ones in Egypt and they'll never be able to take that strength away from us." I remember him saying that as we're looking over the valley. And, you know, so between, you know, like I said Thursday and Saturday evening we spent most of our time, you know, playing tourist. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Getting on the Metro, you know. And, there were people being gone. I remember that mass of, rush of humanity getting in and getting out of the. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) I said, "How do they do it?" you know. I mean, it's just like you've got X number of seconds and two immovable forces rushing at each other, you know. One's trying to get off and the other one's trying to get on. [Laugh] So, we played . . .

**PATINO:** Do you remember being in Mexico and, you know, you're in Mexico City and all this stuff's going on with immigration and stuff, reflecting on what's going on back home?

**BACA:** Oh yeah, you know, it's like, like I told you, or like I stated to you, the furthest I had ever ventured was here in Baja, California, and Ensenada, (Patino: Right.) Tijuana, and Rosarito,



and Ensenada. And, we got that one trip to Culiacán, but that's, that's the most I've ever seen of Mexico and, it was a real experience. Okay. It was an experience in the sense that, you know, you saw where your, I guess, ancestral home is at, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) and then you could see the difference in how things were done compared to what your used to things are done. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) I remember one incident where Ralph was calling home. So, they had to do it for him. (Patino: Right.) So, he went down there a couple of times and said, and every time he came back up he said, "They haven't called yet, but I don't know why." So, he finally got teed off and said, "What the hell is, all you got to do is punch this button, this button, this button, you know, what the hell's the big deal?" But, that's the way they do things, (Patino: Right.) for whatever reasons, (Patino: Yeah.) you know. Those contradictions, like I told you, (Patino: Right.) they're talking about the pyramids one minute and the next minute, quitate, quitate, "Get out of here. Quit bothering me." (Patino: Right.) [Laughter] You know. So, on Saturday we spent most of the day, at least Ralph and Don Pepper, José Berrellez, calling media, you know, just off Alabama, you know. "Hey, we're here from San Diego, Committee on Chicano Rights and, you know, our chairperson Herman Baca is at the first conference here at the Majestic." That was the name of the hotel. "The Majestic Hotel at Talitalhore(?) at this hour," and so, you know, they just went down the phonebook, really. I mean, we didn't have no list other than the individual reporters that I had made contact with. (Patino: Right.) So, Easter Sunday rolls around and I remember once again the military guard putting up the banner, as they did every other day, the bugles, and you know I started preparing for the press conference that I was, had been called for ten, ten a.m. in the morning. Ten or eleven, I forget. Probably more like eleven, it being Easter Sunday, you know. (Patino: Uhm-hmm. Uhm-hmm.) And, Ralph and Don Pepper went down and set up the, you know, the tables in the room there, or, you know, put the



whatever material we had brought for the media. And, me and my wife were in the room, you know, I was trying to get ready and kind of get my thoughts prepared and what have you. So, they kept calling us and said, "Come on. Hurry up. The media's here. The media's here." So, I figured there was going to be maybe ten, twelve reporters. And, I walked into that hall and there was 150 reporters.

**PATINO:** Whew. Wow. [Laughter]

**BACA:** I said, "What the heck did I get into?" [Laugh] You know, my Spanish was not that good, you know. And, but by that time I had, I just resigned myself to, you know, wing it. (Patino: Yeah.) You know, "Hey, they can't speak English that good, so, you know, vice versa." [Laugh] So, I had no qualms about it. So, I remember when I walked in saying, "What did I get into?" for some reason thinking, "Where did this person from Los Lentes, New Mexico and Old Town National City, doing here talking, you know, to 150 reporters, from the largest city in the world?" The thought just came to my mind, so, (Patino: Right. Right.) for some reason, you know. So anyway, it was standard CCR analysis and communications, or, you know, racism, discrimination. After we explained our reasons for being there and that we had come to pressure the Portillo Administration to act on this abuses that had been documented by the Chicano community, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) and violations of human rights and constitutional rights, civil rights of persons, of all persons of Mexican ancestry. Then we got into the particulars, the proposals that were still floating around, the Bracero Program, the militarization of the border, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) you know, the employer sanctions and of the institutional racism and discrimination. And, like I said, typical CCR political presentation analysis of (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) the issue. So . . .

**PATINO:** Did they get to ask questions?



**BACA:** Yeah. Questions were asked.

**PATINO:** What kind of questions did they ask?

**BACA:** You know, the Mexican view is, is very political, for lack of a better word. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Don't forget that was, that was the time when the PRI controlled. So, they were like loaded questions, you know, (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) following the analysis of constitutional racism, discrimination. And questions like about the Border Patrol and "Are they racists?" you know. Well, you know, you know and they, and of course you'd go from racism to the Texas Rangers and, you know, they're taking it all in, you know. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) Questions about the Bracero Program. You know, they were familiar with the Bracero Program, I mean, historically (Patino: Right.) speaking, and you know questions about human rights because of the parts of it, the hypocrisy of it. And then Jimmy Carter's presidency was predicated on human rights and all this (Patino: Right.) documentation is coming in regards to abuses and the violence against persons of Mexican ancestry. And, there was a sort of a, of an acquaintance to the status of the Chicano community. I mean, they didn't know what to make of it.

**PATINO:** Right. That's what I was interested in.

**BACA:** Yeah, you know, like, "We know you guys are there and, you know, but that pocho thing." (Patino: Uh huh.) It's like vice versa. "What does that have to do with us?" (Patino: Right.) You know, like I was telling you about Chicano activists in the '70s? (Patino: Uh huh.) "What's immigration got to do with us?" Well this, this was the opposite.

**PATINO:** What's "Chicano" got to do with us?

**BACA:** "What's this got to do with us?" I mean, (Patino: Uh huh.) "You, you guys live over there. You guys are Americanos, or estadosunidenses," like we used to say. And . . .



**PATINO:** Did you guys implicate the role of the Mexican government in the, in the immigration issue?

**BACA:** Well, it was more of a call to, for them to act, (Patino: Right. Right.) rather than a denouncement of the current situation, (Patino: Right.) you know. It was aimed at, more at the policy of manipulation and exploitation and at, at understanding [Laughter] the, the PRI probably controlled most of the newspapers, [Laughter] you know, the reporter. (Patino: Right.) So, why cut your nose off to spite your face kind of thing, you know. (Patino: Right. Right.) So, it was that kind of a situation. In regards to myself, it was like, "We understand what you're saying but we don't understand what's out there about the group that you're talking about or the people you're talking about. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) That, there had been some contacts, some communications to familiarize the Mexican government, the Mexican people with the Chicano Movement. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) José Angel Gutierrez had a lot of communications, a lot of interaction with the Echeverria Administration, especially Luis Echeverria. (Patino: Right.) I remember José was able to procure a, on the model of other countries, some African countries, you know, symbolically, you know, offering programs, "Hey, you know, to help the black community." (Patino: Right.) José Angel was able to procure some becas, some scholarships, for Chicanos. I remember, and I still got them, I have boxes of books [Laugh] that José got the Echeverria government, I mean, they were just giving them away. [Laugh] Organizations that started to venture into some of the national organizations. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) So, like I said, I, I had established, I guess, a press reputation, even though I had never even been there, (Patino: Right.) you know, just by my contacts from the Klan marches. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, their ongoing interest was, what was happening at the border, and especially at San Ysidro/Tijuana border. Like I said, they would always check in and there was always a lot of communication



with Tijuana so that we used to go back into Mexico City. (Patino: Right.) So, I remember after the press conference I guess we played tourist again. We went sight seeing and what have you. It was Easter Sunday. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) And, the next Monday I was scheduled to leave to fly to Washington D.C. (Patino: Uhm-hmm.) My wife, Ralph, and José were going to fly back to San Diego. Other CCR members had flown into Washington D.C. to wait for me over there.

**PATINO:** Okay. Let's take a break.

**END SIDE 2, TAPE 10, SESSION 8.**

**END INTERVIEW.**