Oral History Collection

Rene Martinez

Interviewer: W. Marvin Dulaney and Alfred L. Roberts

Date: September 7, 2011

Place of Interview: Dallas, TX

Mr. Roberts: Okay. [Claps] We're supposed to clap for some reason to synchronize the sound. I'm Alfred L. Roberts. Today is September 7 [2011]. Here at the African Museum at Dallas, Texas. I will be interviewing Mr. Rene Martinez. We'll have another interviewer coming along a little later--Dr. Marvin Dulaney. He should be along shortly. Mr. Martinez, this is a project of the African American Education Archives and History Program. We are collaborating with the African American Museum on this project. This project's primary purpose is to interview twenty plus people who have knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas County, Texas,

and you have been a vital part of the community and very involved, so we wanted to talk with you about your involvement. There will be a documentary DVD that will be shown here at the museum on November 19, 2011 at 11:30 a.m. There will be a panel discussion, also. So, I have just a few questions we'll start with. Where were you born?

Martinez: I was born here in Dallas. 1946.

Roberts: So, you've lived in Dallas all of your life?

Martinez: Born and raised in [unclear] Mexico, off of Cedar Springs and Cole Avenue.

Roberts: Okay. What is your educational background?

Martinez: I was--attended Dallas Public Schools--Travis Elementary, Cumberland Hill, Spence Middle School [Alex W. Spence Talented/Gifted Academy], North Dallas High School. Then I went on to Southern Methodist University. I obtained my degree in Latin American Culture and History, and Spanish. Did some post-graduate work at SMU [Southern Methodist University] and public administration. Later, I obtained my Master's in Leadership--Educational Leadership from Texas A&M-Commerce

[Texas A&M University in Commerce, Texas] in 2000.

Roberts: Who were your parents?

Martinez: My mom and dad were Cervando Martinez. He was a waiter all of his life. Worked in a lot of restaurants in the Dallas area, Mexican restaurants. My mother's name was Maria [unclear] Martinez, who was a homemaker and raised myself and my brother--my older brother, Dr. Cervando Martinez.

Roberts: Okay. Even though I know your occupation, just for the recording, what is your occupation?

Martinez: I am an educator. I've been a teacher. I've been a campus administrator. I've been a central office administrator, which I am now, with the Dallas Independent School District for the past sixteen years. Also, I've been an adjunct professor at SMU, and also been working at Texas A&M-Commerce as an adjunct professor in the School of Education.

Roberts: Are you a member of any Civil Rights Organizations? I know you are, but just for the tape, we'd like to--

Martinez: I've been a long time member of the League of United Latin American Citizens, better known as LULAC. Been involved with them since about 1977. Presently, I am the president of one of our local councils, one of the oldest councils--LULAC Council 100. I've been very involved with LULAC on immigration issues, immigration reform, education issues, and general civil rights issues over the past thirty-five years.

Roberts: I should have asked you about your children, but I didn't. I heard you say you have two children.

Martinez: I have four sons.

Roberts: Oh! Four sons.

Martinez: Four sons. My oldest is about thirty-eight years old. My youngest has just turned thirty. I have five grandchildren.

Roberts: What about your wife?

Martinez: My wife is also very active in the community. Her name is Beatrice Alba Martinez. In fact, she is the District Director for LULAC for all of North East Texas. She is a realtor broker. Been a realtor for about twenty-five years in

Dallas and very involved in the Civil Rights community.

Roberts: Why did you become active Civil Rights movement?

Martinez: My brother and I discussed that several years ago. We always wondered why because our involvement really began--my involvement began very much so in dealing with racial issues in West Dallas when I was a senior at SMU. I got involved in some issues in Thomas Edison Middle School and I began coaching at the West Dallas Boy's Club, which was predominantly African American. Started coaching soccer. So, we kind of wondered why we looked at race from a different perspective. We'd grown up in a predominantly Mexican-American neighborhood. I never attended schools with African American students until I went to SMU. Met Jerry LeVias, the famous all-American football player and we became very close friends. We're still very close friends, we talk to each other every week. So, I didn't have that exposure with African Americans, but we wondered why we were brought up in a manner to be able to look at race and ethnicity from a

very respectful manner and manner of which where we always tolerated and accepted racial differences. We felt that people should have the rights to do the things that they have to do without being discriminated. We found out later, as we talked, that my father, who had grown up in Waco in the 1920s, shared with us a story about a lynching in Waco. Years later, I shared this story with Zan Holmes, who has been a very good friend and mentor of mine. Zan was very surprised to hear that my dad, as a young man in Waco in the early 1920s, had witnessed a lynching. The lynching was a famous case. I think the name of the young man was Washington. He'd been lynched in Waco and my dad was coming from work as a teenager and witnessed it and it had a tremendous impact on him as a young man from Mexico. My dad later told us the story. He didn't tell us the name of the person, he just said that he had witnessed something and he used that as an example of how people should not be treated in the manner that they were. Of course, this was in the 1920s. Zan later told me that that was

a very historical event in Waco. It was, in fact, one of the last lynchings that took place in that city, yet my dad was there. My brother and I kind of based that as how we were brought up--by a very strong man and woman who believed in civil rights and believed in people being treated equally, no matter who they were, no matter what color of skin they had, no matter what their language was or their culture. That's the way we were raised. That's basically the way we were raised as children, and as young adults, and later as parents ourselves.

Roberts: I'd like to hear more about your friendship with Jerry LeVias and, even though it's a secondary source, some of the problems that he may have encountered at SMU.

Martinez: Jerry recently had a FOX Network premier last year at SMU where he was given an award. It was an HBO special that they had. I was there, Jerry invited me. Jerry and I also met Dr. King [Martin Luther King, Jr.] when he came to SMU in the mid-1960s when we were there. I think it was 1967, or 1966, right before his

assassination. Jerry and I were at McFarlin Auditorium and Jerry got to meet Dr. King personally. I was kind of standing behind after the speech and we got kind of led into the auditorium because there were KKKers [Ku Klux Klan Members] and John Birchers [John Birch Society Members] protesting in front of McFarlin Auditorium. Jerry tells a story of how he kept all the abuse, all the hatred, all the taunts to himself. He based that on the conversation he had with Dr. King. King recognized him and said, "You're going to be an incredible athlete. You are an incredible athlete. You're going to be an incredible celebrity. So you need to restrain from emotion, restrain from getting all these people under your skin." And he did that. Jerry never shared a lot of those emotions with anyone, except for when he came back to Dallas after a game and Jerry and I would play basketball together. Intramural. He'd share the things, the taunts, the people that spit on him, [and] the people that called him the 'n' word. He'd share those with me. So, I was

kind of his outlet. We also went out and partied together. Jerry liked to go to the old Bishop College and go out and see the ladies over there at Bishop because there wasn't much for Jerry to do on campus. Then, I would take him to Mexican dances. Jerry and I bonded. Our experiences were one of those that we found some commonality in who we were. There was only three Mexican-Americans at SMU and Jerry was the only African American in freshman year. Later, there were two others. We bonded academically, we bonded socially, and we bonded because we had a common interest, which was sports. He was a very good basketball player and I play a lot of basketball, so we had a very strong, winning team on campus. To that date and to now, we still talk. Jerry admits that maybe he went to the extreme about keeping all those things to himself. For many years, Jerry was not involved in SMU for anything. He was very bitter and he was very upset with the fact that SMU never recognized the things that he suffered while he was on campus.

Roberts: How did you find the relationship with your fellow students, since there were only three Hispanics at SMU at the time?

Martinez: I looked for outlets. I wasn't discriminated as much as Jerry was. Jerry was on the [unclear] and he was an outstanding athlete. I was never discriminated directly. I was never called names. I could feel the tension. I was not admitted into certain social circles. But there were other students. Anglo students who came from other parts of the country. From Illinois, from New York, from Florida. One of my best friends was from Georgia. I bonded with them. I also had a group of Latin American students. Not Mexican Americans, but Latin American students that I bonded with. Students from Panama, and Peru, and Colombia. I bonded with them. I was fortunate to live at home. I lived two worlds. I lived in two worlds. I would go home during the day and on weekends, I would sometimes stay on campus in the dorms with my friends and some weekends I would go home. After a few years, I was taking--we had a very large home on Cedar

Springs. I was taking young men home with me and spending the night at our house. They would go to Mexican dances with me and they would eat my mother's cooking. I had the luxury of living in two worlds and that was a very strong factor in terms of who I am.

Roberts: Okay, let's leave SMU for a minute. Can you contrast the environment and the social interaction at SMU, because it seems like that that was very positive and wholesome, with the climate in Dallas? How would you compare the two at the time?

Martinez: Well, it was very different. That was academia. In academia, I had some, like you said, nurturing professors, I had friends. I was making a decision of who I wanted to be with. The other community, and you also have to keep in mind that before I went to SMU, I had seen discrimination in the schools. I went to an all Hispanic school--Travis Elementary, Cumberland. At Spence, it was the first time that I ever encountered Anglos. As you may remember, we had the Stair Step Plan in Dallas at that time. I never had a Mexican American

teacher until I was a senior at North Dallas. The Brown [Brown v. Board of Education] decision had been kind of put on hold here in Dallas for twenty years, or fifteen years, whatever it was, since 1954. Immigration was something that I didn't know a lot of about until I went to high school. Elementary school, it was all Mexican American. Our school was burned down. Travis. Back in 1953. My mother was very involved in getting that school rebuilt. She was president of the PTA at Travis. A woman who didn't speak any English, but surrounded herself with English-speaking Mexican American ladies. She took the task of taking on W.T White in terms of getting the school rebuilt. It took her three years, thanks to the help of her garden club and thanks to the help and intervention of Mrs. [unclear] Rodgers [?] that an article was written in the Dallas Times Herald. We were attending a school--Travis had been burned. It was built in 1882. When we were transferred to Cumberland Hill, we were going to a school that had been built in 1888. Then we found out

that the same principal that was at Travis had come to join us at Cumberland. We found out that he had been the principal of both schools at the same time. His name was Alfred J. Loos. Coach Loos had been principal for the two schools. The message was that Mexicans didn’t deserve two principals, they deserve one. He was sharing his time. My mother tried to go through the process, but W.T White never met with her until Mrs. [unclear] Rodgers, who got to know my mother, set up a meeting with an editorial writer and reporter from the Dallas Times Herald. An article came out about the conditions at Cumberland. The school had been built in 1888, with about 600 kids. Cafeteria was dirty, the bathrooms are dirty, sharing textbooks. When that story came out, W.T White met with my mother and her entourage, and the new Travis was designed and built two years later. That’s the upbringing that we had in the real Dallas. It took parental involvement on the part of my mother who didn’t speak any English to take on the school board, to take on the superintendent. That’s what I

experienced. I experienced a segregated elementary school career. Much later, after I got out of SMU, I envisioned the racial tension that existed in the city in the early 1970s. Isolated pockets of tension between African Americans and Hispanics. That's why I decided to go and coach African American kids and I coached them soccer. I take the credit for introducing soccer to the African American community in 1970 at the West Dallas Boy's Club. I didn't do it just to introduce soccer, I did it so the kids could see me as a potential role model. As someone that was different, as someone that could teach them the lessons of being able to get along with others that look like me. I still have contact with some of those young men in the West Dallas Boy's Club. By the way, we won the championship in soccer in West Dallas. I did it for that reason, to be able to teach and to have kids emulate some positive things in their lives. I saw the conditions in West Dallas at Pinkston High School, which were not good. Of course, the whole construction of

Pinkston is itself a history, you know, building a school on top of a dump, it was not a very good sight. That's the old Dallas. That was part of the Stair Step Plan. You build a school for Blacks, and later Mexican Americans and Black who had no athletic facilities. That got me exposed to the things that I later did with my first boss. He was a mentor of mine. He was African American, his name was Randy Ratliff. Randy Ratliff was like a second father to me and a mentor. Worked with the community relations commission. I got involved in a lot of issues dealing with race relations in the schools, the court order of 1971, singleton issues and with teachers, and the Tri-Ethnic committee. I got appointed to be on the Tri-Ethnic committee. My second big exposure was with, at that time, state representative Zan Holmes, who became the chairman of the Tri-Ethnic committee. I remember vividly when I met Zan. He took me aside, I was twenty-four or twenty-five years old. Zan was in his thirties. He always called me Ree-nay [mispronunciation of name]. He

said, "Ree-nay. We're going to be very much in the public eye with this Tri-Ethnic committee." We were branded as a super school board. He said, "You represent a segment of the community, and I represent a segment of the community. I think it would be really good for both of us that when we come out publically on issues that we agree with each other. We may disagree personally behind the scenes, but when we come out publically, it's going to have major impact on how the community perceives us." That was a lesson I learned back in 1971 from Zan Holmes. Zan later became my pastor. Zan later baptized one of my children. He gave the eulogy for both my mother and dad's funeral. We became very good friends, and still friends. We learned a lot during those early days of desegregation in Dallas, especially in the public school of the 1970s in terms of what role African Americans and Hispanics play, especially that leadership can play together and the commonalities we have as leaders and what impressions we leave on the community.

Roberts: Where was Cumberland school?

Martinez: It's still there.

Roberts: Oh, it's still there?

Martinez: Cumberland is on Akard, right a block from the Fairmont hotel. It is now the office of the former governor of Texas. Bill Clinton's corporate offices [unclear]. Still there, beautiful buildings. It's been renovated. Built in 1888.

Roberts: Would you describe some of the kinds of situations you all dealt with in the community relations commissions during your time there? Just a couple of examples.

Martinez: First of all, the committee was a dynamic committee. You had people like Marcus Ranger, a lawyer. He had just graduated from Harvard Law School. We had Kathlyn Gilliam, who was not a school board member yet. First of all, we had [unclear] Bedford, who served on the first committee. Later [unclear] later served. So, we had some incredible leaders from the African American community, including Zan Holmes. We had Trini Garza, we had Frank Hernandez from the Hispanic community. We were

given the latitude by the judge to be his eyes and ears of the community in certain categories. The categories of bussing, the categories of school construction, curriculum, majority and minority transfers, and teacher placement. We were out in the community. Those of us who had more flexibility, like Ms. Gilliam and myself, we were out a lot more. Randy Ratliff gave me a lot of latitude. I helped set up student human relations commissions in various high schools. At North Dallas High School, at Skyline. We were involved, we were at the cutting edge of seeing some of the things that was going on right after the court order was implemented. Incidents where kids walked out of Skyline--African Americans and Hispanics because of racial taunting where African American students had one-way tickets to Africa placed in their lockers by students. [Incidents] where the proportion of Blacks and Hispanics were being suspended from schools such as Skyline, Woodrow, Bryan Adams, and Hillcrest--it was a mis-proportion in terms of those kids

being suspended. The majority of kids were being bussed across town and the vast majority of kids were being suspended where the kids were being bussed. That was the message that was being sent and we did a study on it. We came back to the judge with a study on it. We reported monthly to the judge. We met with the judge on a monthly basis. Judge William Taylor was one of the most incredible, fascinating, intelligent jurists that I've been around. I've been around quite a few of them, including Barefoot Sanders and others. Judge Taylor was a person with a lot of vision, with a lot of strength, and really believed that we needed to desegregate our Dallas public schools. Nolan Estes did an incredible job also. He had to fight, sometimes, day by day, a very conservative faction on the school board. He had a school attorney, Warren [unclear], and a board president, John Plath Green that were going to resist school desegregation as--what was it one of our famous governors from the south said, "Now and forever." They were going to resist

desegregation now and forever. I give a lot of credit to Dr. Nolan Estes as superintendent to be able to navigate those very murky waters. But, with the judge, Zan Holmes' leadership, and with the superintendent, we went through that process in the early 1970s. Then later, of course, with Jack Low Sr. with the Dallas Alliance in the second court order.

Roberts: Do you think the court order achieved most of its objectives? When you look at the schools today--I know that the order was removed a few years ago, and the district was taken out from under court supervision, but do you think the court order achieved most of the objectives that it was set out to achieve?

Martinez: Well, you have to look at it in terms of--the first court order was one of the movement of students. It did that. We did have a substantial number of movement of students in schools that had been predominantly White. Of course, we did have White Flight, also. Schools like Carter, and Hillcrest, and Woodrow, and Bryan Adams, and W.T White were integrated. Integrated, but not necessarily

desegregated. There were some educational programs, but not a whole lot. The bilingual program started with the first court order. Now, the court order of 1976, 1977, and 1978 had a tremendous number of education reforms. It had the Magnet schools. So, if you look at the Magnet schools--the dream of the Magnet schools by Jack Miller, [unclear], and Jack Low, was fulfilled. Two of the top best schools in science and engineering for the talented and gifted in the nation. I was at the Arts Magnet last week, and I was telling one of the counselors, two of the counselors, that that was a dream of Jack Miller, who was the chairman of that effort to implement the Magnets. The dream of having a school where kids from all races, all ethnicities, would be able to come and not only get the best in performing arts, but also have the best academic training. And, guess what? The Arts Magnet is an exemplary school, because it has a great combination of great academics and great arts. So do the ones in Townview, the six schools in Townview. They're all doing

extremely well. The Magnets were--the vision was there and it's been fulfilled. The early learning centers--I think that vision was fulfilled also. In the context of that, the bilingual program was expanded. We now have dual language in fifty schools where kids--African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites are learning two languages and becoming bi-literate, not bilingual, but bi-literate. That program was expanded. The whole issue of--you may remember the 44-44-20 concept. We never would have been--if it hadn't been for Nolan Estes--he implemented that. He brought in the first Latino administrators into the central administration office. It was because of the court order, because of the commitment of Nolan Estes, and, of course, African Americans that later that became superintendents--Otto Fridia and Dr. Edwards [Marvin Edwards]. That never would have happened if it hadn't been for the 44-44-20. The Singleton Ratio, which is part of the first quarter and continued in the second, is for hiring more African American teachers and, later, Hispanic

teachers. Those elements are there. The construction of schools, curriculum. If someone really wants to study what those court orders did, I think, overall, they were very successful. Now, could we say that in 1976 or even 1971 that the demographics would have changed so dramatically? So, where we had a school district in 1971 that was 35% or 40% African American and 8% Hispanic and now the demographics have changed, for a lot of different reasons, and now we have a school district that is about 70% Latino and about 23% African American and about 6% other--would we have been able to project that? Absolutely not. If someone had told me that, I would have said, "I can't believe it, I won't believe it." But it's happened. So, in context to the demographics, those are the challenges that we now are having to face. To look at the change in demographics and how do you address the needs of the change in demographics. Do we accept the demographics? Do we embrace it? And, as educators, [do we] learn how to address the change in demographics, or do we

deny, and stay in a state of denial, the changes in demographics? Those are our choices. That's for everyone, not just one particular ethnic or racial group.

Roberts: We've primarily dealt with education, but in terms of some of the other areas impacting citizens that usually fall under civil rights [such as] housing, criminal justice, employment, and so forth, could you talk about how the civil rights movement has impacted Hispanics and African Americans, particularly, and do you see any improvements in those areas that still need to be made?

Martinez: The other key area has been basically law enforcement, the criminal justice system. I also cut my teeth in the community relations commission dealing with the police issues. Forget about education, in the early 1970s, Dallas was a very volatile city when related to police and their treatment of Hispanics and especially African Americans. There were some very high-profile shootings--Michael Moorehead, Santos Rodriguez--that took place in the early 1970s where the police, and there

were very African American policeman on the force--Donald Stafford was one of the first high-ranking deputy chiefs and he was about the only one. There was no high-ranking Hispanics on the police force. In fact, there were very few Hispanics on the police force. So, the whole notion that the police force--the perception within the Black community and Hispanic community was that it was an open season on Blacks and Hispanics. There was very serious cases of shootings and killings during that period. Santos Rodriguez was the one that I was really involved with. It happened three blocks from my mother's house, and I also was the organizer of one of the marches that later became a riot. I was a part of the riot, but I was the organizer of the event and it turned into a riot in downtown Dallas. This was where a child, Santos Rodriguez, was killed by a policeman in a squad car as he was playing Russian Roulette and interrogating a twelve-year-old about a break-in into a coke [Coca-Cola] machine. The march that took place was not just Hispanics. The march was African

American, and White, and Hispanics, marching downtown Dallas. 5,000 people on a hot July summer afternoon. It later turned into a riot because of the tension that existed. I say that there was a lot of hatred and passion and right as the riot began to explode and the crowd started attacking police cars and motorcycles, I saw an elderly Hispanic woman coming up to a squad car. I had been out in the crowd, telling people to restrain from attacking people and restrain from breaking into the stores and [unclear]. I saw this elderly Hispanic woman walk up to squad car that had been smashed, and she had a newspaper wrapped up in her hand, and she started hitting the squad car. No one around her. She just kept hitting it, and hitting it, and hitting it. I thought to myself, "That woman has a lot of frustration, a lot of hatred, and she's been through a lot. Not just that day, but probably throughout her life, and she's taking it out on a symbol." That symbol, of course, was the police car. I knew at that time that I had to leave downtown because the

riot was out of hand and the police had to come in. Police community relations were very challenging for a lot of us. Al Lipscomb was another person who I worked with very closely. Al was a community organizer with [unclear] and Randy Ratliff had been his mentor, also. I used to see him a lot and we became very good friends. We marched together, we picketed together. He got involved in the Cesar Chavez movement with myself and others. I later learned as Zan Holmes and I and Al were driving to Ft. Worth [Texas] one day to speak to a church--we were in a car, driving together, and I made a comment, and Lip would always say, "Excellent! Excellent point!" That was his cliché comment. It caught my attention. I was in the front seat, and he was in the back seat and I said, "Lip, what did you do before you became an organizer?" and he says, "I was a boot-licking waiter at the best restaurants in Dallas." And I said, "Well, my dad was a waiter too. Where?" He started naming all the restaurants and he said, "I also worked at La Tunisia restaurant." I said,

"When did you work at La Tunisia?" and he said, "Around the early 1960s. 1961 or 1962." And I said, "Lip, I was a busboy at La Tunisia. Where were you stationed?" He said, "I was stationed out in the front." I said, "No wonder you use that term!" We were trained at La Tunisia that when the customers would come in and order a beef kebab or shish kebab or Baked Alaska and they would ask, "How is this entrée?" and our response was, "Excellent! Excellent choice!" I said, "Lip, I think I was your busboy when we were working there." So, that's how far back that I go with Lip. We all laughed, of course. We marched together, we picketed together, we protested together, and we became very dear friends. I learned a lot from Al Lipscomb, in terms of his passion and his commitment to seeing what the minority community was all about.

Roberts: What about housing? You spoke about criminal, though you spoke more about the police part of criminal justice, but what about the courts then and today?

Martinez: I was nominated to be on the grand jury in 1972 by Frank Hernandez. Frank was a jury commissioner. Those days, you had a grand jury that served for three months, for four days of the week, all day. You had literally no Hispanics or African Americans. There had never been a Hispanic on the grand jury, and very few Blacks, because, you know, who could give away three months of their lives for four days a week at eight hours a day? Frank was appointed by Judge Jerome Chamberlain to be a jury commissioner. Frank was a very good friend of mine from the Tri-Ethnic committee, and he said, "Would you like to serve on the grand jury?" I didn't know that the grand jury, and he said, "You're qualified. You're eighteen years old and older. You're degreed." Randy Ratliff was going to give me the time, so he nominated me. In those days, you had five jury commissions and they submitted a list of four and their top one person would be on the grand jury automatically. They submit the names to the judge, and the judge would pick the top person from each five

commissioners. Well, I never got contacted. Frank called me one day and said, "Have you been contacted by the jury foreman?" and I said, "No." He said, "You were my number one choice, you would have been number ten on the grand jury." I said, "No, I haven't." He called the judge, and the judge said, "No, I didn't nay Rene. Rene is number seventeen. I just don't think Rene was qualified." And Frank, being a civil rights attorney, said, "No, he is qualified." And the judge said, "Well, I'm not going to appoint him." Frank called me back and said, "Do you want to take on the judge and Henry Wade?" I said, "Let's do it." He said, "You're going to get hit with a lot of publicity." I said, "Let's do it. We got to bring about some change with the grand jury system." So, for the next three or four weeks, we're on the front page, criticizing the grand jury process, the district attorney who was not supportive, and, later, a defense attorney filed a notion with the Texas Supreme Court, saying that all the indictments of that grand jury should be voided because the jury

was paneled illegally. They had already indicted hundreds of people, and that really shook up the system. Judge Onion and the Supreme Court ruled against us, but he did say, in his ruling, that the judge should by abide by the process and should not change the process. So, if you have a process, you go by it. Years later, I saw Judge Chamberlain, I never knew him. I ran into him. He came and apologized to me, and this was a few years before he died. He said, "Rene, I was wrong. I got bad information from someone in the community that said that you were involved in the peace movement." I said, "Well, they were right about that, I was involved in the peace movement." He said, "But they said you were smoking a lot of dope." I said, "I've never smoked and I never will and they were wrong about that." He said, "Well, I was wrong, and I apologize to you." After that, the first Mexican American was appointed to the grand jury.

Roberts: Who was that?

Martinez: Don't know whether Sal Moreno [?] or one of the federal employees that was there, but I was not the first.

Roberts: What about housing? Did Hispanics experience exclusion from public housing and public accommodations?

Martinez: There was a lot of zoning issues. Back in the early 1990s, I became the vice-chairman of the Dallas Planning Commission. I was appointed to the Planning commission after I had been appointed to [unclear]. I was vice-president of [unclear]. I became part of the establishment. What I saw was a lot of zoning issues before then. A little Mexico got cut in half and literally got shredded with the construction of the toll road. The whole issues, very similar to Fair Park where folks would come in and provide low-dollar amounts for folks as they use the eminent domain law to purchase properties. We saw a lot of that in little Mexico. We saw a lot of discrimination in terms of folks not having the opportunity to buy where they wanted to buy. I saw some of that, but housing was not

an area that I was much involved in until much later when I became a member of the Planning Commission. My areas of concentration and time were in education and police-community relations. Then, later, the whole issue of immigration and immigration reform.

Roberts: What about employment issues?

Martinez: Other than dealing with numerous complaints--a lot of complaints about employment with LULAC and, to this date, we still get a lot of complaints, on a weekly basis, on employment issues. People that are being discriminated. Of course, in this climate, it's very common. A lot of disparity in terms of employment among Mexican Americans. A lot of complaints over the years. LULAC has been in the forefront in being able to resolve that, take it to EEOC, to be able to take it to the appropriate source within the school district, the city manager. That's really how I got involved with the city of Dallas, through working with the city manager. Later, I got appointed to positions and I was able to do a

lot more than being an advocate. I was an advocate at a decision-making level.

Roberts: What about economic development in terms of the Hispanic community and relate it to the period 1950 through 1990. So did you see any changes there?

Martinez: Really, the boom of economic development that really started was in the 1970s. The first effort to really hire a director for the Hispanic chamber, the Mexican American chamber at that time, was very significant. The first director, I remember vividly, was Isaac Trevino. Under the leadership of Frank Hernandez and Trini Garza, who were chair of the chamber, they received contracts. The chamber really became the focal point in the 1970s of being able to do things for the Hispanic community, specifically for small businesses, in terms of getting SPA [Sponsored Projects Administration] grants and doing minority procurement and talking about minority procurement. But, keep in mind that in the 1970s, the numbers were very small within the Hispanic community. As the

population grew in the 1980s, especially under the Reagan administration when we had the amnesty in 1986, the number started to dramatically change. Right now we have close to 50,000 small businesses that are Mexican or Mexican American or Latino. That boom has just taken over. The 1950s--very low development. Very little. It was "Mom and Pop" shops where I grew up. Grocery stores. My grandfather had a grocery store, my uncle had a grocery store--Hernandez grocery over next to El Fenix. Restaurants--El Fenix, El Chico. That's all we had. Tailors, tailor shops, auto shops. Not much economic development in the Mexican American neighborhoods. Mostly family owned, mostly given to their sons and daughters. Not a lot of education, you have to remember that in the 1950s and 1960s, [there were] not a lot of Mexican Americans going on to college. Very few in fact. It wasn't until the 1980s and 1990s that we started seeing those changes.

Roberts: I think I read somewhere [that] the Hispanic female enrollment in community colleges--that enrollment is very high, but the Hispanic

males are not at the same level. Would you comment on that? Then I have one final question unless Dr. Dulaney has one.

Martinez: They're catching up. I belong to several scholarship boards--The Stars in their Eyes and I also work with United Eagle College Fund. We're beginning to see now more and more Hispanic males graduating from high school and going to college. The gap is being closed a little bit. Basically, females have had the advantage for a lot of reasons. One is in terms of home and culture, in terms of how young ladies in the Hispanic community are nurtured. How a lot of young men have to work. As of today, I've had young men with full scholarships. Full generations going to college. First generation Mexican Americans turned down full scholarships and the reason was that they had to help their family work. Just broke my heart. Here's a kid who is ranked third in high school, third in his class, and turned down four scholarships. He may be going to community college. We have great community colleges. But, again, the

whole issue of working and supporting your family and knowing that your mom or dad may be out of work or knowing that your dad is underemployed, knowing that your mom can't work. So, that young man has to find a job and, thanks to our economy, those young men can find jobs. They find jobs legally and they find jobs illegally in terms of being Dream Act kids, kids that don't have social security cards, and kids that just have to work. So, hopefully, we're changing that paradigm so that we can get that message to young men that they also have to go college, they have to graduate from high school, and they have to get [an] education. Once they get educated, they're going to be able to help their families a lot more than having to make seven dollars an hour.

Roberts: One final question, then I'll turn over to Dr. Dulaney. When history is written, who are some of the other Hispanics that will have a place in the Civil Rights Movement in terms of contributing to it in Dallas County?

Martinez: In Dallas, I would say--I would start with my pediatrician. His name was Julian Saldivar. Dr. Julian Saldivar I have a picture of him, sitting on his lap. Julian Saldivar, very few people know this, was a doctor who was a survivor of the Bataan march, and he was the first Mexican American pediatrician in Dallas. His office was on Cole [Avenue] and Hall [Street]. He retired--he came back from the war. He had been a prisoner-of-war for four years. He was a lieutenant colonel in the army. I remember Dr. Saldivar as a man who was an incredible doctor. So, I would place him at the forefront as far as being a role model. Civil rights and labor rights--Pancho Medrano. Pancho Medrano was a union worker involved with African Americans, Dr. King, March at Selma, but also involved--he took me out to register voters when I was twelve years old. He came to my grandfather's store and asked my dad if he could take me to go register voters and my dad said, "Go on with Mr. Medrano." So, he was another icon. Anita Martinez--she was the first city councilman. She was outspoken

in her own manner. She was a lady, and still is a lady. She's a very nice woman who did some things that were in the forefront for Mexican Americans. I would say Anita Martinez was also an icon. [unclear] Hernandez, another doctor who passed away about fifteen years ago. He was very involved in the Civil Rights movement and also in dealing with issues that dealt with the county and the city. He and, a lot of people don't know this, Emmett Conrad were very good friends. They're the ones that got the first minority medical students into the medical school. Dr. Hernandez and Dr. Conrad who--he was a tremendous surgeon, by the way, who opened the road for medicine for minority students. Dr. Hernandez would be one. I guess now, at this point, Frank Hernandez, also, who was a civil rights lawyer. He was very knowledgeable and learned how to transcend race. He represented Ernie McMillan when Ernie was part of the SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] movement in Dallas. He was the attorney that came to the forefront. Later, [unclear]. [unclear] was a

very--is a very prominent attorney at her age, in her mid-eighties. She was a tremendous role model for a lot of Latinos.

Roberts: Thank you.

Dulaney: Mr. Martinez, excuse me for coming in late. I had driven from Arlington after meeting with my staff. Has Dr. Roberts explored your role on the Tri-Ethnic Committee with you?

Martinez: A little bit.

Dulaney: Okay. We had Reverend Holmes in and we asked him a lot of questions about his selection and why he was picked. Dr. Roberts, did you ask why they selected you?

Roberts: No.

Dulaney: Why did they pick you to be on the Tri-Ethnic Committee?

Martinez: I wondered that for many years, but you got to know how Dallas works, and I learned how Dallas works, later in life. The judge was William Mack Taylor, and he was a democrat. He had been appointed to the bench by John Kennedy. Before he became a lawyer, he was a member of a law firm called Strasburger & Price. I worked for the community relations

commission, under Randy Ratliff, and the first chairman of the community relations commission that had been set up to deal with race issues was Tom Munez [?] and Tom Munez's law firm was Strasburger & Price. I was young, I was outspoken, I had long hair, I was a radical, so to speak, and I got involved with the grand jury issue that I mentioned earlier, and Mr. Munez was also my mentor. He would always call me and he'd [unclear] his comments to me by, "Have you gotten a haircut first?" I kind of link both together. I think Mr. Munez had a kind word to say to Judge Taylor, I think there was a link there. I always wondered, because I was only twenty-four or twenty-five years old. I didn't have the background that many of the other members, like Frank or Zan Holmes or even Ms. Gilliam or [unclear] Bedford, had. I was the youngest--I was the pup of the group. I think Mr. Munez had a lot to do with it.

Dulaney: Okay. You know prior to the Tri-Ethnic committee, there had always been these biracial committees. In fact, they had always sort of

considered Mexican Americans as White. How did you feel when they finally decided to recognize that there was a Hispanic or Mexican American community that also needed attention and representation in issues of desegregation?

Martinez: Well, again, I put the credit to Judge Taylor on that. Judge Taylor was, as I said earlier, an incredible jurist. For him to create a Tri-Ethnic committee in 1971, the foresight that he had was incredible. Of course, he had read the cases in Denver--the Keys case that was also tri-racial, tri-ethnic. I think Judge Taylor knew what he was doing. He wanted to send a message, and he did. The key was not that it was just tri-racial, that it recognized that we were three ethnic and racial groups, but the key was how we worked together. The precedent was set by Zan Holmes in having us come out publically as Latinos, as Hispanics, and African Americans together on public issues. And, believe me, we disagreed. I disagreed with Ms. Gilliam on issues, and counselor Ranger and others, but disagreed privately. Publically, we would

always come out together. We did that as a minority community.

Dulaney: Changing the subject, when Dr. Roberts asked you about some of the Mexican Americans that made a contribution and who you thought were important in the history of Mexican Americans in the community, you didn't mention Rene Castilla. What did you think about his efforts as school board president and--of course, you mentioned Pancho Medrano, and Rene replaced Robert Medrano on the school board. What do you think of Rene Castilla's contributions? Do you think his efforts split the Mexican American community? I'm asking a long question, I'm sorry.

Martinez: Rene is a friend of mine. I consider a friend. I consider his tenure on the school board as being very tenuous and less than inspiring when related to race relations. You have to understand that not all of us have the same upbringing. I sited with Dr. Roberts my upbringing, and my upbringing with my parents and being in Dallas with African Americans as friends and mentors, Zan and Randy Ratliff,

made me, as a man, maybe a different person than Rene Castilla. So, I did not view race from the same lens and from the same history of events as he may have. I understood our differences but I also embraced our differences. I didn't have mentors like Zan Holmes and Randy Ratliff just go to naught. I learned from those things, I learned from my elders. Rene may not have had the same upbringing. That's as much as I can say about his tenure, unfortunately.

Dulaney: I got sort of two last questions. We really appreciate your time coming over. What do you think about the performances as school superintendent of, and this is a loaded question and I know it, Dr. Yvonne Gonzalez and Dr. Hinojosa.

Martinez: Again, you have to place to all those things in the concept of time. Dr. Gonzalez came to the city at a time when, again, race and racial politics has been, and still is to an extent, tenuous. I, personally, was not an admirer of Dr. Gonzalez. I was not a supporter of Dr. Gonzalez. I did not believe she had the skill

sets to become superintendent and the fact that she was Latino, bilingual, to me, was not the ultimate of being superintendent. Now, fast forward to Dr. Hinojosa. Dr. Hinojosa had the skill sets. He wasn’t totally bilingual, by the way, I had to help him a lot when I went out into the community and I helped him translate. He learned, as he went along, but he had the skills sets. Dr. Hinojosa will leave a legacy and will have a legacy in Dallas in terms of academic achievement. I just don’t think Dr. Hinojosa felt comfortable around a lot of people. He was an introvert, he was not a social animal, as Nolan Estes was. Nolan Estes could stand up in a room that was fighting, and the next thing you knew, he’d be up in the front and having everybody working together. Dr. Hinojosa did not have those skill sets, the social interaction skill sets. The ability to build consensus. Though, academically and structurally, he did. He was a bit thin-skinned. He didn’t like criticism, from anybody. To be a superintendent, you

can't be thin-skinned. You got to be tough as nails. I wish him well.

Dulaney: Last question then. Would you do it all again? I guess this is sort of two part--would you do it all again and what do you think your legacy is to the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas County?

Martinez: I hope my legacy is one that people will say--again, going back to my mother, she believed in helping people, and my father. Helping people--[I hope] that is my legacy. My mother was very religious. We grew up in a Presbyterian church, and she later became a Baptist. I was baptized in a Presbyterian church, and now I'm a Methodist, thanks to Zan Holmes. [Laughter] She believed in helping people, and I have always done that. My wife and I have always done that, especially young people. We've helped a lot of young people, number one. Number two, they haven't all been Hispanics. I've mentored a tremendous number of African American students that are now professionals. I would hope that my legacy is one that I cared, that I made some changes,

and helped make some changes in our institutions. I may not have accomplished a whole lot, but I was kind of the guy who fell on the barbed wire and had other people jumping over my back. That may be my legacy.

Dulaney: Would you do it all again?

Martinez: Oh, absolutely. With no hesitation.

Dulaney: Alright. Anything you want to add?

Martinez: I think this is a fine project. I think oral history, especially for some of us that are reaching that age and may not be around or be able to circle the block too many times, is very important. It's very important for our young people so they will learn from our mistakes and they will learn that race relations and ethnic relations is that one that they should be able to deal with. With language, culture, and differences, instead of being alienated and instead of feeling that they're not included. I think this is a very great part of the legacy of our [unclear].

Dulaney: Yes, we feel this has been very--actually, this has just been wonderful. I'm going to use that adjective. We want to, again, thank you for

coming out and adding your piece to this project, because it's very important. Dr. Roberts may have told you that we're going to produce DVDs and we'll send everybody a copy of their own interview.

Martinez: Got to get it in the schools.

Dulaney: Yes.

Roberts: With all this technology, that may be much easier than it used to be because we can put them on the Web and they can access them from there.

Martinez: Absolutely, especially when we do--I teach a course in community culture and language and [unclear]. Multicultural education. We have African American month and Hispanic month and that's all fun and good, but that's not really what it's all about. It's all about getting kids--I don't know if you saw that report that was done in Irving on African American students.

Dulaney: Yes, I did see that.

Martinez: I read part of that report last night. It's not a lot of rocket science in that report and basically--there's two reports. One on teacher attitudes towards Blacks and another on Black

student's attitudes toward teachers. The final conclusions are shades of twenty years of what we did in the police academy. We have to understand what racism is--remember Nolan Estes' institutional racism--what is being a racist, what are those terms, what are those things that we need to learn. They're not doing it in Irving. Teachers are not being taught about ethnic and racial differences. So, their perceptions of African American kids are one and the perceptions of African American kids towards their teachers are another. It's totally disconnected. So, what do you think we need? We need some more training. We need to bring those links together. That's not rocket science. It's simple. It's not simple, but it's something that can be taken care of. So, I think this is something that can be done very effectively to do that.

Dulaney: Thank you very much.

Martinez: You're welcome.

[End of Interview]