Gilbert Rivera
TCU Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project
https://crbb.tcu.edu/interviews/interview-with-gilbert-rivera

Part 1 – Family and Childhood:

TCU: Let's start with an easy question. Where you from? Where's your family from?

Rivera: Okay. I am Gilbert Rivera, I was born October 4, 1947, I was a twin. I was born here in Austin, Texas, but spent my, maybe first six years in a little town south of Victoria, Texas, called Marianna or also known as McFaddin, Texas, where my parents were sharecroppers. They worked on a big farm there and they were people that planted the corn, they planted cotton. The whole extended family lived in this little town and we were all sharecroppers. And at times we would also do migrant work to west Texas. We'd go to cantaloupes, picking cotton, and so forth.

We'd moved back to Austin, Texas around 1950 or so and I started school out there, Independence School District, in 1957. Oh, I'm sorry, when I was six years old so, I was born in '47, so when I was six years old. And I wound up in a situation where ... also Independence School District was segregated at the time.

I only spoke Spanish so I wound up being in the first grade for two, maybe two and a half years because they had a policy, it was the [Gold Valley 00:01:58] Elementary School, that if you spoke Spanish you would be sent to the principle's office and punished. What they did is, if you were going to the cafeteria, you know how they'd line you up. They'd have kids standing in the hall, they'd have kids observing in the cafeteria, and if you were caught speaking Spanish on the hallway or in the cafeteria, you were sent to the office. If you were caught speaking Spanish in the playground you were sent to the office. And so what I did, and I think what was my act of defiance at that time, was that I got angry and I decided, well, if they don't like me speaking Spanish, I'm not going to speak. So for about a year or more I'd go to class and I wouldn't say a word. They'd ask their questions and if I spoke with an accent the teachers would reprimand you. They wanted you to be perfect English.

Being brought up for the first seven years of my life, six years of my life, in a farm where everybody only spoke Spanish, that's all I knew. In my house, both of my parents spoke Spanish. My dad had a fourth grade education, my mother had a sixth grade education, and so they spoke very little English. We were a family of six. What was interesting is that this was not a phenomemon on me only, it was all the Chicano kids in the barrio that went to that school had the same problem.

Years later, many, many years later, as an adult in my 20s, I met a poet named Raul Salinas who was the founder of the book store that we're sitting in now. I was reading some of his poetry. He was raised in Austin, went to the same school system. And I found a poem and it's very simple. It says, "Mexican kids will not

speak in the classroom. Mexican kids will not speak in the cafeteria. Mexican kids will not speak in the playground. Mexican kids will not speak." And that's exactly what I did. I decided not to speak because you would get punished. So Mexican kids will not speak. It was very, very moving for me to hear that, to read something like that from when I was six years old. To read another person's experience that had gone through that around the same time that I had.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/gilbert-rivera-discusses-his-family-and-childhood

Part 2 – Family History:

Rivera: Within, inside that farm there is a cemetery where our ancestors are, and so we go visit every so often and we've got gravestones there that date back to the 1850's. And so many of them were people who were living here before Texas was even a state. Texas was an independent country at one point. Even that.

So our family has been around for many years. My grandfather was...and I was honored to have met him. He died in 1971, but he was born in 1889. And had a little rancho called El Rancho de Las Arbores, the Ranch of the Buzzards. And so that's where our family is, right on the border. And we all have heard this all the time, when my grandfather was very much of a strong man. He was very pissed off that he could no longer cross the border as freely as he could before.

And his parents, his parents were born right around the Texas Revolution, and so they experienced that, and my grandfather, born in 1889, and experienced living on the border.

The Mexican, the Revolution of 1910. [foreign language 00:01:20]. And many of the people crossing over and they were much supportive of that and was in essence, and people don't read about this or know about this very much, but it was in essence an underground railroad.

We all know about the Underground Railroad here in the states with the African American, the slaves, being taken to Canada. Well, in our case, people through the Underground Railroad, Mexicanos, to help people, to save family members, would get people across the border to the United States from the war in Mexico. So we had our own Underground Railroad from Mexico to the United States.

But that's not... you don't see that anywhere in American history. And that's one of the problems that we have. Our history is very seldom told. That's why what you guys are doing is extremely important.

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Part 3 – Punished for Speaking Spanish in School, Resistance:

TCU: Can we go back to Go Valley Elementary School?

Rivera: Mm-hmm (affirmative),

TCU: You said that you were often punished for speaking Spanish. You would have to go to the principal's office.

Rivera: Right.

TCU: Do you remember what sort of punishments that you had to go through, if any?

Rivera: Well, we had two primary sorts of punishment. One was that you were spanked and your parents say we really couldn't do anything about it because that was what the rule was in the day. And I remember my mother crying because I was being set home literally with my butt purple from blood welts. That's how hard they beat you. So she would be upset and then they'd come to the school to talk to the Principals and they basically say, "Well, he's a bad kid 'cause he's not obeying the rules." And there's nothing we could do. Today those principals would probably be put in prison for the type of beatings that they did. And we had one principal that he was calling out ... That's about the only principal that I remember 'cause I hated him so much. His name was Mister [McCarty 00:01:23] and we were all Mexican kids. So if you can follow the process here, we said, “Mister McCarty, Mister Mac, Mac, Mister [Mockle 00:01:33].” And so we used to call him, "Oh. Your name's Mockle."

We couldn't pronounce McCarty, so we said [MoCorty 00:01:40]. And so we shortened it to Mockle. And I think he would catch us using that name and he would probably more than be glad to beat on us again just 'cause he knew that we were using that name, but what was good about that school though is that it was a neighborhood school and all of your friends, and everybody knew each other, and everybody was [inaudible 00:02:09]. You had a lot of friends and everybody was in the same boat and so we supported each other. It was an experience. I went on through high school and I never lost my accent. And so I went, "Okay. I'm going to take Speech." And then I had problems there because I couldn't say "speech," I'd say ["speesh 00:02:39]." And I could have said [shursh 00:02:41], [beesh 00:02:44]. It's an accent. So again I was being punished. And I remember the 12th grade I was taking College Preparatory English and we were reading Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.

I don't know if you're familiar with that book. It's an Old English. Terrible. Terrible. And the first or second day, I forget, maybe the first semester the teacher gets me up and says, "Read one of the poems." So I started reading and I started saying shursh and beesh. And she said, "Wait a minute." And so he stood me up for the whole class and he said, "Okay. Can you say 'cha, cha, cha'?" And I said, "Yeah. Cha, cha, cha." And he said, "Say chocolate." "Chocolate." He says "Church." "Shursh." "If you could take chocolate, the C-H, and cha, cha, cha, how

come you can't say church and peach?" And I said, "Because those are English words and what you're telling me to say is Spanish. That's my native tongue." And he could never understand it. So long story short, College Preparatory English I did my shallow, stubborn thing again. I went to class every day. Never missed a day of school, but then did not one lick of work for the whole senior year and almost failed.

And he ultimately passed me with a D minus, minus, but it was my ... What do you call it? My stand against that type of a person, that type of [inaudible 00:04:21]. I couldn't do anything else, what else could I do? I couldn't beat him. I couldn't curse him out. And so I just didn't do anything and that was my way of challenging his authority I guess. And of course, even more interesting because of the fact that I had problems with English and so forth and for the first grade because I was first grade two and a half years. So by that time they had already labeled me retarded or mentally deficient.

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Part 4 – University of Washington:

Rivera: I graduated when I was 17, right around 20 I went to Seattle, Washington to the University of Washington, and I went to the university and they had a CAMP program, for migrant workers. I had been a former migrant worker. They said, "Would you be interested in going to college?" I said, I don't know I've never thought about it, and I was a pretty good student in high school, I had straight A's in almost everything, so they said, "As a migrant worker you can qualify through the CAMP program," so I said sure why not. I didn't have anything to do, I had moved to the University of Washington, because I [inaudible 00:00:43]and I wanted to go there because it was a lot of activism going on over there, political activism.

I signed up, went took my freshman year, they signed me up I was a college student, no tests, nada. Plus I was given a stipend for monies to live, and of course the first thing I did, I went and bought a really cool stereo system. I lived in the dorm and we blasted out music all the time, but I was also a little older. Remember I went in at about 21-years-old, 20, 21.

TCU: About what year was this?

Rivera: 1972, 73. I told Juan Sanchez, the director of the Chicano Status Programs, that I had already worked here and the Travis County Mental Health and Mental Retardation department as a counselor, is that a degree? I would basically, I went to get the clients for the few people that had Master's Degrees. I was very frustrated at the way they were diagnosing the [Chicanitas 00:01:51]here, and at that time the big thing was sniffing paint and glue, and so they were making them

... giving them diagnoses of being psychotic and putting them into the state schools and giving them very strong anti-psychotic drugs that they were basically zombies. I mean you could see them walking around like zombies, just very bad. My director was a psychiatrist, he said Gilbert, quit this job, go to school, because as long as you don't have a degree, nobody's gonna listen to you, and you're right this is bad the way they're treating them. He was a latino psychiatrist from Argentina.

I wound up at the University of Washington and after the first one year, I told Juan Sanchez, I don't wanna be a junior, sophomore, senior, blah, blah, blah, I want a Master's Degree in social work. Well you have to do this, no I don't. You have to go through this, no I don't. He said well I can't help you. I did some research and low and behold the University of Washington had a non-baccalaureate program and the school of social work. So I left as a freshman, took an application, filled it out, the next fall I was accepted into graduate school. Went to there, then came back to Austin, and continued my life as an adult. In between all of that, there were a lot of things that happened, but that's the educational part.

TCU: Okay.

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Part 5 – Friends and the Vietnam War:

TCU: Why don't we get into some of the stuff that happened in between? So, you graduate high school and then you move into this position where you're acting as a [inaudible 00:00:11]. Was it a state program, or a city?

Rivera: County program.

TCU: But I imagine there's a lot of protest, and this is when the Chicano movement is sort of coming into its own. What sort of activism were you interested in at that time, or during high school?

Rivera: The first thing that I started noticing was is many of my friends from high school started dropping out and disappearing, and many of them joined the military to go fight. And then they went to fight in Vietnam. And many of my neighbors were coming back in coffins.

As a matter of fact, Johnston High School ... the school here in Austin that most of us went to at the time ... again, was still segregated. Was 96-97% mexicano, Chicano, and it had the highest rate of casualties in Vietnam war of any school in the city of Austin. And if you all are interested, it's Memorial High School right now. Y'all might want to go in. There's a monument type of a thing where all the names of all the young men and

young kids that died in Vietnam or enlisted, and there's approximately 30 something names.

And that is a large amount from kids from one high school back in the time. There's probably more than that, because they ... my neighbor next door, we used to call him, instead of Freddy, Mosca. My friend Mosca, one day was gone, and a year later, and had a funeral for him.

Another friend, up on the top of the hill, Jesse [inaudible 00:02:13], one day was gone, and then he came back. But he was no longer ... He was my best friend, but he was just totally messed up from the war. And he had stacks of Polaroids of pictures of the Viet Cong, the enemy that he had killed.

And one of the things that they did ... he said the first person he killed was a 12 year old boy that was sitting on top of a water buffalo, because he was told that, "Either you kill him or he's gonna kill you later," so [inaudible 00:02:49] And he's got pictures of him and his friends ... he was a marine ... of him and his friends with necklaces of ears. Ears, that in order for you to be able to count your dead, your trophy was that you went in and you would cut the ear off of the person you killed. And then you would be given credit for the kills.

And one of the worst things that they said they'd have to do at night is you'd hear shots going off at night all the time when they were asleep, and it was not that it was the enemy, that they were shooting rats. Because the rats would come in and eat the ears that they had. Was trophies, it was like a scalp. And so he came back [Spanish 00:03:34].

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Part 6 – Police Brutality and Militancy:

Rivera: So, I even tried to join because when I got out of high school, I was gong ho all American. I'm still America and love my country and all of that, but I learned real fast that what I was taught in school and the day that I walked out of school, I began to see what it was really like. All of a sudden, I'm a brown kid in a white society trying to find a job and then all of a sudden you realize that you're brown. Before, I didn't realize that I was brown. I was just a person living in the city and all of a sudden, people began to say, "Well, where do you live? Well, I live in this East [inaudible 00:00:42]. Oh, you live in the poor side of town." I said, "No, I don't live in the poor side of town. Well, you live next to those projects. Yeah, and so? There's nothing wrong with that." For us, it was just, you lived. This is where you lived.

So, all of a sudden, you were labeled as brown, and poor, and living in the bad side of town. So, those labels began to get to you, and what really got me into that is that, I began to meet some students from the University of Texas. Some young people that were in MAYO, Mexican American Youth Organization, and they were a little older than I was, and they started giving me books to read, and I started reading books on [inaudible 00:01:37] and Mexican history. All of a sudden it's, "Wow, I didn't know this about this," or, "I didn't know about that. I didn't know about the treaty [inaudible 00:01:47], I didn't know about all of these activists [inaudible 00:01:52], and all these things that had happened."

All of a sudden, I started getting this feeling of pride and I said, "Wow." Also, by that knowledge, becoming angry because of what they had taught me, or not taught me. There was a lot of ... I met some people that were doing activism and so, one day, we went out, they were having a fund raiser at one of the [inaudible 00:02:32] in town. So, we went out. We raising money, and when we got out, the police had surrounded the building. I mean, it was cop car after cop car, and we walked out, and they ...

I was one of the first ones to walk out, so the police grabbed me and told me that, I had five minutes to leave. Well, not even five minutes, a couple of minutes to leave, and I told them I couldn't because I was waiting for my brother, and so, before I knew it, they had two cops grab me, one on each arm, and pulled my head back, and one of them with a night stick hit me right on my nose and busted my nose.

It became pretty much a mini-riot. I mean, they were ... A bunch of people were fighting the police, and the police fighting them. Physically fighting the police. I was thrown in the paddy wagon. I was charged with eleven charges. Assault, public intoxication, cursing at a cop, destroying public property, because I had put ... My blood has spilled on the cop car, so that was my fault, and on, and on, and on.

11 other, 12 other people were arrested besides myself. So, I tell people that I was beaten into militancy, because right after that, and I had already met some people, and I had been reading [inaudible 00:04:09], so I got some of my friends and says, "We need to start a [inaudible 00:04:17] chapter here in Austin, and that's how the [inaudible 00:04:21] chapter started here in Austin with my beating.

When I went to court, on all the charges, I beat them. I was found not guilty of everything, and I was going to take them to a ... I filed a civil rights case against them, and I made a deal with the police department who had 11 other people, men and women, that they were arrested, and I was going to go to court and say, "Oh, this is a great time get shit loads of money," but then I said, "No." I told the cop, "Here's what I will do. I will not file a civil rights lawsuit against you, federal rights lawsuit, if you drop the charges against everybody."

They compensated me with $100. That was my economic reward, $100. Cost my parents about $2,000 to find me a lawyer to defend myself, but to this date ... I'm 70 years old, that was when I was about 23, 24 years old, I run into friends that were arrested, and they're all men and women, and they say, "Gilbert, I remember from the trial. How come I was never called?" I say, "I don't know." To some of them, I have finally told them, because I never told anyone every that I had made that deal in their name.

So, they knew they were going to go to jail. They knew they were going to go to prison, because some of them literally had jacks and they were literally beating on the cops. I mean, it was really horrible, but all the charges were dropped, and I never told them. It wasn't about that, it wasn't about money, it was about what I considered to be justice at the time.

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Part 7 – Cooperation Between Black Panthers and Brown Berets in Austin:

Speaker 1: And so the Brown Berets started and little by little we became pretty big here in Austin, to our surprise. We would be getting calls from Senora Martinez that they beat up my hijo last night for no reason.

Speaker 2: They the police?

Speaker 1: They the police. So we talked to Ms. Martinez talked to the young man. Or somebody else would tell you, "Well they beat up my son." And so forth. And then we began to get people joining the organization. As we got little bit more stronger, we began to work with making alliances. And one of the alliances we made was with the Black Panthers, here in Austin.

Speaker 1: The Black Panthers, at that time, here in Austin were led by a man named Jessie ... Actually it was Jesse, not Jesse Jackson, Larry Jackson. Larry Jackson. And he's still around he's a, I see him every so often having coffee, we talk about the old days.

Speaker 1: We began to talk, and we began to say, "Look, what they're doing to us, they're doing to you." And back and forth. So we said, "We need to come together and form a stronger alliance amongst ourselves." So that waws very, very good because we began to realize that it wasn't just us. And it wasn't just them. It was people of color, poor people. So your political consciousness begins to be from a very much of a nationalist point of view. "Yo soy Chicano" and "Chicano Power" and all that, you become more politically conscious and you begin to take it as a class struggle. And it's an issue of class, not necessarily black or white. Even though we were targeted, because it's basically the poor versus the wealthy. You began to read more and-

Speaker 2: Do you remember the types of books that you were reading?

Speaker 1: Oh yeah. It's gonna surprise us. All of the sudden I was reading Marx, Lenin, I was reading about Franz Ferdinand. I was reading everything that you could get your hands on. That's where you learn the global, I began to think more of an international perspective. Again, this is before I went to University of Washington, and so when the, the thing that really worked for us with the Black Panthers, is that they had a lot more experience than we did. We began to emulate what they were doing, and what they were doing to organize. They had their headquarters, we had our headquarters. They had child care, they had a school for the kids after school for the kids that didn't have their parents at home and they would provide free lunches for them and so forth. We said. "We need to do that."

Speaker 1: So we had people that volunteered, they gave us books. All of a sudden these little kids started coming to the Center La Raza, Centro Chicano it was called here in Austin. Centro Chicano. We had oranges, bananas, cookies, whatever, and kids books and like a room here. We'd sit down and start reading with them. And what was interesting is that we could get, we began to get their parents knocking on our door. And the parents would say, "What are you all doing with my kids? Who are you?" And we would say, "We're the Brown Berets." We wore our caps and our military uniforms. The kids are out running on the street and this, they just came because some other kids told them that we were here and we played with them in our yard, played catch or whatever, then they'd come in.

Speaker 1: Then you get the parents involved, some of them joined the Brown Berets. The ones that couldn't they said, "Oh, so I don't work, I'm a Senora [inaudible 00:04:28] when do you have the kids here?" "Well we have them here from 3:00 to about 5:00 and then their parents get home from work." Well I'll tell you what, I'll bring some taquitos.

Speaker 1: So before you knew it you began to develop this core group of people that was 150% behind you. You could not do wrong. Because they knew that you were helping your community and they would always say, "I support the Brown Berets because you all are defending us." We were not afraid to stand up to the police, we were not afraid to stand up to oppressors. So by providing the food, we were also helping them in many other ways. So that was one of the many benefits that we got by our allegiance and our connection with the Black Panthers.

Speaker 1: In later years there was another group called the Black Citizens Task Force that we aligned with also and held demonstrations and unity conferences and so forth here in Austin.

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Part 8 – White Progressive Groups:

Rivera: We also had a lot of white progressive groups coming in to help us out. And some of them were young communists and some of them were socialists. But they came and went, because they had a different ... We may have been reading the same books, but our interpretation of what a book that is by Lenin ... It's a very good book, and it's called What Is to Be Done? If you read that book, it does an analysis of what the problem is. And then it says, "What is to be done?" And it takes you step by step. How are you gonna organize? How are you gonna tell people, understand what their problem is, is your problem, and vice versa?

And one of the things that those books ... When they were written, it was during the Industrial Revolution. And prior to the Industrial Revolution, everybody was ... You had your cobbler, you had your blacksmith, you had your farmer, you had all of these people, and you had your seamstresses. And everybody had their ... They were suffering independently. But when the Industrial Revolution happened, all of a sudden you've got all these masons working in one place, all these seamstresses working in another place, and then they talked to each other. And they said, "You've been having the same problem? Yeah. And I live in another town, but you're doing the same thing I was doing, and you're ..." And the one positive thing that the Industrial Revolution did is bring people together, and they began to unionize. They [inaudible 00:01:55] and said, "We're oppressed by the capitalists. We're being paid very little money, and we're working in dangerous conditions. So let's organize." So that's how the unions started. Without the Industrial Revolution, there would probably be no unions.

And so that was something that we found out. And again, you'd read those things, and you'd say, "Well, how do you use that knowledge and that experience to mobilize people here that are not necessarily working together, but live in the same community?" So you start having community meetings and bring people in and say, "Mr. Hernandez from the Govalle neighborhood is having the same problems that Mrs. Sanchez over here around the King Bee is having the same problem, or the lady in [inaudible 00:02:52]. You all are having the same problems. And so get together and you organize."

And one of the things that you always did was you always told people that came, "Never, ever, ever tell people, 'This is what you need.'" You lead by being told. They're the ones that are here. They're the ones that are telling you what their problems are. You don't tell them. They tell you the problems, and you organize around their issues, not what you think is the issue. Because once you start doing that, you lose them. You lose the base.

TCU: You suggested that sometimes UT students, I'm assuming Anglo UT students, would come into the neighborhood. And they would come in and

they would come out. And you seemed to suggest that you guys didn't always see eye-to-eye on the solutions for the problems. What do you think was the cause for that disconnect?

Rivera: Well, thinking back, and that's a long way to think back ... I really think that it was ... One, that we were very angry. And that anger translated into a lot of militant organizing. And we wanted to confront the system. We wanted to let people know exactly what was going on. And we wanted to do it now. Some of them, they were Maoists. I don't even know what a Maoist is. And they would come in and say, "Well, this is the way Mao does it, and the Industrial Revolution, and Mao's way of doing things." And we said, "We don't care. This is the way we're doing it."

"Well, you need to follow this in order to be successful."

"No, we don't. We need to do what we need to do, and we know how to do it. And we're gonna be successful at it."

And then again, it was like they wanted us to follow them. They wanted us to be their cadres. They were the leaders, we were their army. We said, "No. We're our own army."

And so that was one of the biggest battles that we had. And many times, we'd have meetings in a room like this, and they'd start spouting socialist slogans and all that. And even though we had read it, our interpretation of that was a totally different way than they interpreted. And they were very dogmatic. And if you didn't do it like Lenin said or like Mao said, you were not a revolutionary. We'd get into those type of dialectical discussions. "We are the product of racism here, and we are the product of classism here, and this is the way we're going to deal with it. But if you follow us, we can help you do it." We said, "No. No. We don't need ..." So we'd kick them out.

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Part 9 – Politicization and Childhood Experience:

TCU: Do you think that perhaps the lack of understanding of racism on their end, because in the community you guys were experiencing police brutality, you guys were being differentiated because of your brown skin. Do you think that lack of understanding contributed to the disconnect?

Rivera: I think that they had a class analysis also. But I think that they also came from a position of white privilege. They had not experienced what we had experienced. They knew that there was class. As one of the writers, I forget his name right now, but he said, "You have the haves, you have the have a little want more, and

you have the have nots." We were the have nots and they were probably part of the class that were the haves. Mark said, petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

So we were the proletariat and we had another Mexicano professor who got his PhD on the thing on the brown berets. His PhD was, "How do a bunch of uneducated, lower class, Mexican kids become political?" I saw him right here. He came maybe six months ago and gave a presentation here. We were pissed at him. Why are you calling me a lower class? I'm not lower class. I may be working class but not lower class. And how do I, an uneducated young man [inaudible 00:02:16]become a brown beret and politically involved? Life, brother, life. I mean, how stupid can you be? You're working on your PhD and you don't understand the life of a poor person. You experience it every day. You experience it in racism, you experience it in sexism, you experience it from your dad, being treated like he's nobody. Your mom being treated like she's nobody. And you're treated like you're nothing.

If you don't have the ability to do that analysis as a young person, if nothing else, you gotta stand up and say, "You don't treat my mom and dad like that. I'm going to defend them." And that's the basic thing. We learned it through experience.

Some of us moved on to college and learned more, and learned to do a better analysis of it. But the bottom line is, how many of us, if you think back, even you guys, why are we here today in this room? It's not necessarily what you learned in school. It's what you learned at home and your life. You know what, there's something going on here and I want to make it right. And that's, to me, is the most beautiful thing about being an organizer, being an activist, is that you learn it through osmosis.

My parents were migrant workers. My dad used to work for a dollar an hour and my mother used to get 50 cents an hour and they raised six kids. Sometimes we could barely survive. But we survived.

My mother used to drag me around when I was a little kid, because we lived in [inaudible 00:04:00], part of the neighborhood here in Austin where we had no paved streets. We had no sewer system. We had septic tanks in the back yards. We had a toilet, an outhouse. And in the middle of the city of Austin, in the 1950s, you walked across Interstate 35 and you got people living in mansions and you're cutting their grass. We used to go out there and cut their grass and stuff. And then you come back home to a life of poverty in the ghetto, the barrio.

And your mom's walking around knocking on doors, getting petitions for us to get lights on the streets, paving on the streets, sewer system so we could have flushing toilets. And you're a little kid. That's how you become politically involved. Because you see, for me, what I saw, was the suffering of my parents. And like all of us kids, we always say, I know every kid in the world tells their parents, "One day, mommy and daddy, I want to buy a big house for you."

I wanted something better for them and so, that's how I became political. And my parents were very, very proud of what I did and my brothers and sisters, too. They had an elementary school education. All of us graduated from high school. Some of us went into and still have our businesses. Several of us went on to universities. My dad always told us, "You are the last generation of children from our side of the family that are going to be migrant workers."

Since then, my kids, my son graduated summa cum laude as an engineer. My grandson just graduated from high school with a community college degree. He is starting at university as a sophomore in chemistry. He is 17 years old. What my grandparents taught my parents who taught us, we taught our kids. When you're talking about the American dream, we're all dreamers. Whether you are illegal or legal, or documented or undocumented, or whatever you want to call yourself, we're all dreamers and we dream for something better for our families. That's what it's all about.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/gilbert-rivera-discusses-politicization-and-childhood-experience

Part 10 – Serving His Local Community, Lifetime Activism:

TCU: Let me just go back a little bit. Was this why the Brown Berets ... Was it intentional to ground your work and your activism in the community? 'Cause you could've had the Centro Chicano anywhere, but you chose to put it in the community, and you chose to have services for the community. Do you think ... I know you said you patterned yourselves after the Black Panthers. But was this your way of giving back to the community?

Rivera: Well, this was our way of ... Yeah, it was a way of not only giving back, but of providing something that people did not have. You had all these parents, once you started the Brown Berets, calling you constantly from all over. From Lockhart, from San Marcos, from other cities, saying, "Can you all come to Lockhart and organize over here? 'Cause we're getting hurt like you all over in Austin."

So if we had put our ... And it was a little barrio house that we were renting. If we had put it anywhere else in the city, it would not have been as effective. Because we were from that community, we were in the community that was needing our help, and that's how we let people know that we were from here. And our motto was, when we took it straight out of ... Stole it from the police. "We're Brown Berets. We are here to protect and to serve." And we were protecting our community and serving our community.

And so by providing all these services and things, people began to see that there could be opportunities, and they themselves began to organize

themselves. We helped organize neighborhood associations, other nonprofits and other groups that spawned off the Brown Berets. And many of us, like Susana Almanza, like myself, like [inaudible 00:02:22]. He's a city councilman. He's a Brown Beret. Susana's a Brown Beret. I'm a Brown Beret. And we've got the bookstore, we've got [inaudible 00:02:32], we got a council member sitting at the city hall.

And so these young militant kids that went face-to-face with the police and got beat up several times have ... From our twenties and our teens, we're now in our fifties and our sixties, and some of us in our seventies. We've never stopped. Because in order to be a good organizer and a good activist, you have to move with ... You have to be fluid and move with the objective conditions that you're living under. And we went from, we still do, battling police brutality to now fighting gentrification, and to fighting gentrification to demanding a seat at the council and at all other levels where we are equal to them, and boards and commissions, and demanding that schools teach Chicano studies, Mexican-American studies, in high schools. And all of those are nothing different than what we were doing back in the '60s.

And so some of us are PhDs. Some of us ... We have a Brown Beret, Zeke [inaudible 00:03:58], who's in that picture over there of some of the Brown Berets. He's a PhD in California. I have always told people that students that are coming through ... Because I had one time a friend of mine at University of Washington who said ... We went through school and he saw me years later and I was still an activist. And he says, "You're still doing that shit?" And I said, "Yeah." He says, "That's stuff you only do at universities." I said, "No, man. That's stuff you do for life."

And I always tell students that if you're an activist in college or you're doing what you guys are doing, get the best education you can. Don't let them brainwash you at the university. And go back to where you're from, whether you live in Austin, or in Buda, or in Raymondville in the Valley, or in Traverse City in Michigan, or in Spokane in Seattle, or wherever you're from. Go back and use what you learned to help your people. If you don't, if you become a Highspanic, you're not helping nobody.

We don't like to use the word Hispanic, but we always say that those that do are Highspanics, 'cause they think they're higher than you are. And they are. You know who they are. I can guarantee you, you've got three names in your head right now. "Yeah, [Spanish 00:05:47] and that one and that one, that's what they are." And because they just [Spanish 00:05:52] and they think they're better than you are. As my dad says, "[Spanish 00:05:57]."

It's something that you do for life. And when I tell people that when you become an activist, something clicks in your mind. Something says, "I care for people." I care for the human condition. I cry ... And if one of us bleeds, we all bleed. And I cry for the ... 50 people that are killed. The 50 young men and women that were killed in Orlando. Because they're me. They're you. They're us. They're human beings. And as a human being, you need to be ... You care for everybody. And if you can't care for people ... People say, "Well, I care for my family." We all care for our families. But when you become an activist, you have this worldview of how things could be better, because-

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/gilbert-rivera-discusses-serving-his-local-community-lifetime-activism

Part 11 – Internal Struggles within the Chicano Movement, Successful Community-Building:

Rivera: We had big struggles, internal struggles, where some of us were very nationalist. [foreign language 00:00:07] Chicano, period. And I want to take back the southwest, and take back [inaudible 00:00:13] and make it our own free nation. And we're gonna treat the Gabachos the way they treat us. That's not right. You can't do that. Or, I'm Mexican, I'm not a Chicano, and so we had a lot of internal struggles amongst ourselves, different groups. I belong to an organization called CASA, [foreign language 00:00:45]. And we were ... when I was in university, I carried three books. When I was in CASA, I carried 10 books in my arm. And they were all about internationalism, socialism. I joined the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, for the freedom of liberation of Puerto Rico from being a colony of the United States. I helped organize here in Texas something called CAMILA, the Chicanos Against Military Intervention in Latin America, in the 1980's. Co-founder of [foreign language 00:01:33]. Founder of the Brown Berets. On and on and on.

With every organization that you work with, you bring in new people. Those new people are the people that ... and especially if they're young, I always tell people, "We all ... and this is one of the teachings of the internationalist books that I read, is that we all ... when you're organizing, you plant seeds. Your job as an organizer is to plant a seed. And you speak to somebody and they're listening to you, you can tell that their minds are open, and that's your opportunity to throw that seed into their mind, and you begin to talk to them about stuff. I always tell people, the question is always, if you put a seed in the ground, what makes it grow? Is it the water you put into it? Is it the sun? Is it the fertilizer? What makes that seed grow?

My analysis has always been it's the seed. The water and everything else are just the nourishment that you give it to grow, because the seed has to have ... and like I tell my son, if you don't have [foreign language 00:03:13] to grow, if that seed doesn't have anything on it to grow, it's not never gonna grow. But if it's gonna

grow, it's gonna grow into a pecan tree, a peach tree, whatever. And the same thing with a kid or a young person, or your children. If you don't provide them that seed that is inside of them and then nourish that seed, it will never become the person that you want them to be. The job of an organizer is to be like the ... like one apple seed. You're just spreading the seeds around people, and you hope people will grab them.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/gilbert-rivera-discusses-internal-struggles-within-the-chicano-movement-successful-community-building

Part 12 – Attempting to Change the Name of Johnston Elementary School:

TCU: I want to get to your current activism, but I had a few questions about your early activism, if we may go back. I know that police brutality was a constant thing in east LA ... East Austin. What other things did you all as the Brown Berets organize against?

Rivera: One of them was the way we were treated in the school system. Remember, we grew up in the day of segregation and even in high school in the 60s, Austin ... 1953, I think it was the US Government versus Topeka, Kansas. Topeka school district, I think it was. The law passed that segregation was illegal. I think it was 1953. Here, in Austin in 1963, still everything was segregated. Austin was under a US government oversight until 1972 and then, up to 1972, they said that finally Austin was actually an integrated school system. We fought about those things because we felt that the school systems, we needed to work on was important for us to talk about what they were not teaching us. Again, most of the things that we learned, we learned after school, after high school and even after college.

For example, Davy Crocket was my hero, so was Daniel Boone and all those guys and then I began to read who they were and what they did and who they represented. I said, shit. These are slave owners, Indian killers, rapists. They stole our land. No longer was the Alamo my place to worship. It was my place to hate, but we were being taught that in school. One of the things that we did that was ... Was it 1973? Today, there's a big movement to change the names of all the schools because they have confederate generals and whatever names. Johnston High School was named after General Albert Sydney Johnston, a confederate general. [inaudible 00:03:08] in the school. 1973, the Brown Berets, we raise all kinds of cain for the first time the Austin school district had a district board meeting at Johnston High School.

It was one demand. We were trail blazers, if you will. 1973, we decided that we wanted them to change the name of a confederate general, to someone we understood because we were 97% Chicanos and so we had a big, and it was very loud, very raucous. We were just yelling and screaming and doing everything that we could. Maybe that turned out to be the wrong tactic, but we lost, but we had said that we did not associate or hold him as a hero. They said, "Well, he's a

general. He's a hero of the south." That's what they taught you in school. Our thing was, well we want Johnston High School to be named Emiliano Zapata High School. We knew we were climbing up a big mountain and knew that we probably wouldn't get it, but we weren't afraid to challenge, so that's one of the other things that we did.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/Rivera-rivera-discusses-attempting-to-change-the-name-of-johnston-elementary-school

Part 13 – Organizing Neighborhoods, Fighting Gentrification:

Rivera: When we started getting all these people together from the different neighborhoods, we began to organize them as neighborhoods, as geographical neighborhoods. We had the Central East Austin neighborhood, we had Barrio Negro, we had the Montapas neighborhood, we had Govalle-Johnston Terrace neighborhood. And then within those groups, there's leaders in each one of those neighborhoods.

And then you're not, the Brown Berets, are not the leaders, but the people that they choose to lead their particular neighborhood associations are the ones that move. So what we were doing, we were basically mobilizing people in large numbers to go and confront the city council. And neighborhood issues going from police brutality, to lack of services, to almost anything and everything that you could think of, we'd go before the city council. We had no houses were being built in East Austin for the poor, people couldn't go ... There was no bus services, and so a lot of times people had to cross we called it Interstate 35. If you notice, Mexican-Americans pretty much we all live on this side of the tracks of Interstate 35. We used to call it Interracial 35. Instead of Intermural, what do you call it, Interstate 35, it was Interracial 35, but that was the dividing line.

As a matter of fact, maybe one of the other people you interviewed already, we used to live on the other side of Interstate 35. You've heard that story, right? And they slowly moved us over here. And what I tell people is, and what we do today is, what I do mostly today is just remind people of the history. And I tell them that what's going on today is no different than what went on in ... When was it that the Mayflower landed on Plymouth Rock? 17-

TCU: 1690. Oh, yes-

Rivera: 17 something, the day of Plymouth Rock. If you will give me a chance here. The pilgrims land on Plymouth Rock. They look west and say, "Oh, what a beautiful land." They stick their flag in. They say, "This is ours." And they slowly start taking it all. It doesn't matter who lived there. Forget the Indians, the Iroquois, the Apache, the whoever, the Comanche, all the way to California, right? They took it through guns and through bullets and disease and through robbery, right?

Today, with identification phenomenon is that there living in West Austin, and then one day some homochitto decided to look over the road, over the Interstate 35, and thought, "Wow, what a beautiful land." He stuck his flag in East Austin, and said, "What a beautiful land." And he decided, "I'm going to take it." And so today, through ordinances, through laws and through legal maneuvers, they're taking our land. We're the indigenous people of this city, so then slowly they're moving us east. Back in the day, they moved us west. And so one day, there will be no ... We will be living in Huston maybe. And it's a difficult thing to see.

I always tell people, "When I see a home being bulldozed, because they buy the houses and they tear them down, and they build monuments to greed." When they were taking over the West they'd kill the natives. And for example, in the Black Hills, they wiped out the natives. They knew that the Black Hills were sacred, so guess what they do in later years. They build a monument to their presidents on top of the sacred land.

Well this is sacred to us, so what they do here is they tear down our homes. And I tell people, "Every time I see a piece of dirt, a lot, there's nothing but dirt, it's like a fresh grave where they're burying our people, our culture, our history, our language." And what did they do on top of that, which is no different than what they did back in the 1700s, 1800s? They're building monuments to themselves, which are the mansions and the condominiums and all of that. And all of those are what they worship, which is greed and money.

Same thing happened in Mexico when Cortes came. What's the first thing they did in Mexico City, the Aztec's land? They blew up and burned most of the temples. And what did they do? Build monuments to their greed, the Catholic church, on top of the Indians. So right now, this is basically internal colonialism. There is nothing different than they've been doing from day one, when the first pilgrims came. It's only being done now through laws, ordinances, maneuvers, and they're getting away with it. And so our struggle is to fight them at every place that we can.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/gilbert-rivera-discusses-organizing-neighborhoods-fighting-gentrification

Part 14 – Fighting Gentrification, Desire to Preserve Memories of the Barrio:

Rivera: And the struggle is no different from the struggle that my great-grandfather and my grandfathers had when Texas was stolen. It's no different. We're not ... the struggle didn't start with the Brown Berets. It didn't start with Lulac. It didn't start with Emiliano Zapata or anybody, or people like that. It started many years before that. And so we're nothing more than just the newest generation of people struggling. And you got to give us credit because we're still here [foreign language 00:00:40], you know. We don't have our native tongue no more. We've got the tongue of [inaudible 00:00:47] in Spanish, but we're really [Native

American]. [foreign language 00:00:58] and it's gonna be hard, it's very hard for them to move us out.

But with every condo that goes up, I've been thinking, and here's another project for you guys, and I've been thinking about this as a project for me, we're all on Facebook and Twitter and all that kind of stuff. You read all the people lamenting about how my [foreign language 00:01:29] is disappearing. You've read those things, right? I've been thinking I want to pull all of those three, four paragraphs that people write that I remember where my grandmother used to buy [foreign language 00:01:41] over here, and I remember this, and I remember that. And put them all in a book, just all those sad commentary about how our neighborhoods are being destroyed because everyone of those comments, whether it's one paragraph, two paragraphs, one sentence, is the crying of our people saying, "We are being destroyed as a ... our culture is being destroyed. Our people are being destroyed." And so they would make, I think, and incredible book for somebody just to pull everything out and just put it into like a [foreign language 00:02:28] so people can read because one day most of us ... This used to be the most populated area for Chicanos. It's not anymore. It's mostly hipsters, and we're being pulled down.

So one day, can you imagine opening up this book and saying, and there's people saying, "I lived at 1000 Buenos Court, and in the 1980's my house was torn down and I remember when my kids were born there, and I remember this." Pulling all of those things out that people are writing on social media and just putting it into a book that is so emotional, so strong that no writer could write something that powerful because it's people's actual experiences being up on paper.

And so I've been thinking of that as a project for me.

TCU: That sounds like a fantastic project.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/gilbert-rivera-discusses-fighting-gentrification-desire-to-preserve-memories-of-the-barrio

Part 15 – Austin City Council, Tax Revenue:

TCU: You mentioned that part of your job as an organizer is to confront political power, bring issues to the City Council. Can you talk a little bit about how receptive the City Council has been to your request for services in the community. Maybe you can speak a little bit about in the 1960s ad 70s, but talk about now. How receptive is the Council to your issues now?

Rivera: Well we have understand that the city is a corporation, and as a corporation the city is about making money to keep itself alive, and so many times we are on the opposite position on that. When we tell them that we don't want to see condominiums being built in our [inaudible 00:01:03], that we don't want to see

whole blocks being bulldozed down, and condominium complexes going up, we're going up against a powerful corporation. And that corporation is telling you you got 50 little casitas where Mexicanos, or African Americans live, or poor people live in general. Those 50 casitas maybe bring in, I'm just throwing out numbers here, 20000 dollars in taxes per year.

Thank you very much, but think about this. If we bulldoze all of that down and add it to a couple of acres and we build 2, 300 condominiums that run at 500, 600, 700000 dollars a year. Think how much taxes that'll bring into the coffers. The city will be making much more money, so do the lives of poor people matter when the goal is greed and more money?

It really doesn't, but they play the game, and they try to convince you that they do care and we're there fighting every step of the way. We do get some concessions every so often. We win a batter here or there, but it's a long protective struggle. The harder we fight I think it's the city's position that ... They have their goals. They have already a preplan of what they want. In 1928 the city launched a Massive Plan. They moved all of us from black and brown, African American and brown people, Chicanos, from West of Interstate 35 over to East Austin in the 1928 master plan.

Today in 2016 they have a massive plan called Imagine Austin. I tell people Imagine Austin is really Imagine Austin Without Poor People because that's what it is, and it's nothing more than a continuation of the 1928 Massive plan. In 1928 they moved us East of Interstate 35. In 2016 Imagine Austin is moving us further East because as they move in we're being taxed out. We're being pushed out, and all of a sudden you've driven around here and all these condos, all these big buildings, all these bars, 15 years, 20 years ago, were not here.

East 6th street used to be full of restaurants, Tejano clubs, Chicano clubs, and all that, and one day I was driving with my wife down East 6th street and I told her, "Jane, grab the camera, quick, grab the camera." And she said, "What's wrong?" And then I told her, "Take a picture, I just spotted a Mexican." Because all you see is white people.

All of a sudden this brown face amongst a sea of white.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/Rivera-rivera-discusses-austin-city-council-tax-revenue

Part 16 – Gentrification, Pricing People Out with Property Taxes:

TCU: You mentioned ... can you explain what you meant by the developers are taxing you all out? What do you mean by their taxing you out?

Rivera: Well, with every building that has built, you have a house that is a regular barrio, una casita. There was two people living in it. They were there for 30-40 years and

I'll give you my personal example. My wife and I bought a house in 1983 here in Austin. It cost $39,000, just a little house. Been about 15-20 years that gentrification has really started moving into East Austin. Five blocks away on Holloway, they build a condominium project. That property is valued in the millions which means that the houses around it, their taxes go up because of this project that you had nothing to do with. Two houses down, some developer buys a house, hipster buys a house and he's not buying it for the house, he's buying it for the land. So, he tears down the land and builds a McMansion. That's a $400,000 McMansion. I still live in what was originally a $39,000 home. So, his house has cost taxes in my ... and the value appraisal of my house to go up which makes my back taxes go up.

Okay. So, I haven't done a thing to my house. I'm just living there, taking care of my chickens. So, here's what happens ... what has happened. In 1983, I bought the house for $39,000. All these buildings came in. 2000, my house is worth $69,000. More condominiums come in, more houses are being build. 2016, my house is worth $380,000; the house that I bought for $39,000. The taxes have gone up from less $1000 a month to over $6000 a year. I'm a retiree, I live on $1700 a month, Social Security. My taxes are $6000 a year. So that means that half of my income goes to taxes. As it goes up, my Social Security doesn't go up but my taxes do cause there's another condominium, another McMansion going up, another bar going up. So my taxes keep going up. At some point my taxes are ... the taxes I owe on my house are gonna be more than I take home from Social Security. So, guess what happens? I'm out of here. I've been priced out.

That's what I see and people around here on social media and people say “Well it was their choice to sell out.” And people are like “It wasn't my choice. I would've loved to stay in my casita where my children were raised and my grandfather taught us how to read and whatever. But, because of the policies of the city of Austin to allow this development to happen; I have been priced out and I moved out of town."

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/gilbert-rivera-discusses-gentrification-pricing-people-out-with-property-taxes

Part 17 – Gentrification, Encouraging Young People to Become Activists:

Rivera: I wrote a little play called "In The Heavens"... [inaudible 00:00:07] it's called [Spanish 00:00:07], the stubborn ones, set in year 2050, and you got... and my wife says that's you, and I said okay. And I said here's Don Martin and Dona Felicia and they're at home and then Martin says, he's on the phone, [Spanish 00:00:30]. I just got a phone call from one of the people down town. [Spanish 00:00:42] Well they want us to bring all the people in the barrio together, and put on Mexican hats and play accordion music [Spanish 00:00:55] because they're going to bring a tour bus of developers, of hipsters to look at our neighborhood. [Spanish 00:01:04]

And then we talk about, remember when we lived on east of 35 and Rainey Street and Juarez Lincoln building and how they tore it down, and we demonstrated. [Spanish 00:01:18] and they tore that down [Spanish 00:01:31] and then they say, which is a lie from my dad, and [Spanish 00:01:39] the dogs used to walk themselves in East Austin. Because they used to roam free, now you gotta have them on chains and you know and [Spanish 00:01:51] we'll give them a pachanga. [Spanish 00:01:57].

Maria [Spanish 00:02:01] go to the Home Depot and pick up pickets and Martin go to the HEP and get some cardboard and some paint and Juana you know [Spanish 00:02:15] Eloisa the megaphone and we'll show them a party. So everybody comes to the house and they're making signs and making pickets and doing everything and then it's real long but then they said, "Here comes the tour bus." And the tour guide is saying, is showing people around, and then you're inside the tour bus and Demario says, "you know what, when we pass that little neighborhood over there, I felt something strange going on," and the tour guide says that happens all the time when we pass that neighborhood. And he says, "What is it?"

And while they were passing the neighborhood the people outside were yelling, "No more gentrification! Ya basta! Out of East Austin! [Spanish 00:03:20] remember Juarez Lincoln. Viva Cesar Chavez" and all of this, so everybody is demonstrating. And they said, "yeah the people say when you're driving by in the bus you feel that something's happening outside and nobody is ever able to figure it out." And he says, "what people say is that it's the spirits of the people that used to live here."

And that's my interpretation of what's happening, and that in 2050 our spirits will be all that's left, and so, unless we continue our struggles. And our struggle is, you know in 2050 I'll be dead, but hopefully somebody younger than I am will still be here fighting the fight that we fought and so I don't see me passing as the end, I actually see it as just passing the mantle on to somebody else that is going to carry it after me and my generation are gone because there are beautiful, young, strong people that are much more educated, much more aware, much more powerful than we probably ever were. All we are right now, is to me, as elders, is people that can help them understand how much power and strength they have in themselves, and if we can only do that, I've done my job.

TCU: Yeah, sure.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/gilbert-rivera-discusses-gentrification-encouraging-young-people-to-become-activists

Part 18 – Saltillo Collaborative and the Chicano Economic Development Corporation:

TCU: I have a couple more questions, sir. What is the Saltillo Collaborative?

Rivera: Saltillo Collaborative. I'm not sure what-

TCU: Okay, let me provide context. I was reading online that the city wants to come in, and provide, they want to redevelop an area in East Austin, and in the negotiations, it was stated that at least 25% of the residential homes had to be affordable, sort of rent-subsidized.

Rivera: The Saltillo, back in the '80s there was a plan, development plan, put together by [Avario 00:00:57]. One of the organizations that we put together, which I didn't talk about, called Chicano Economic Development Corporation. The Chicano Economic Development Corporation was a corporation that got funded, and it was meant to help build affordable housing, help people with things like that, and we actually built 15 houses here in Austin.

One of the things that we had done, we had put out something called Plaza Saltillo. All they did was build a little plaza where the train goes by now, and it's a little plaza with what's going to be a mercado type thing. That's all that was ever done. It was never really fully done, but the goal at that time was to build affordable housing, have an amphitheater or for music and cultural events and all this. It never really happened, except for the Plaza Saltillo.

Now, today, the Saltillo Collaborative is something that people are saying is very similar to that, but in fact it's something again that we imagined, and the city took it over and made it their own. What they're doing is, there's a piece of property there that is owned by Capital Metro. They are building several hundred, if not several thousand, apartments in the area, in the barrio, in the middle of the barrio. It's going to mixed use. It's going to be 10 stories or something like that, and the bottom is going to be offices and stores and things like that. It's going to be culturally relevant, and they're going to be providing affordable housing.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/gilbert-rivera-discusses-the-saltillo-collaborative-and-the-chicano-economic-development-corporation

Part 19 – Affordable Housing and Development in Austin:

Rivera: That's where the rubber hits the road. What's affordable? Right now when they talk about affordable housing, they really talking about houses for people that make 80% median family income of a federal HUD as a scale that they talk about. At 80% median family income is a family of four, generally that makes generally about from $70,000 to maybe $80,000 a year.

Then you go down 80%, 60%, 50%, 30%. A family that makes 30% with a family of four that makes 30% median family income then is making about $15,000, to $20,000, $25,000 a year. 30% or 40%, maybe $25,000 or $50,000, and so forth. So, what's affordable is the question?

When the city of Austin, they provide incentives for developers, they tell them, "We will give you breaks on development fees, we will give you breaks on taxes, we will even give you money if you provide affordable housing in your project," and the developers say, "Yeah, we will." So, generally they will provide 10% affordable housing, is what the rule is, and so, let's say you've got 100 units that you're going to build, and this one is much bigger, much, much bigger, but let's look at 100 units. 10%, 10 houses or 10 apartments. They're not building houses, they're building apartments. The houses, there's no chance that they can build houses today, they say because of the market.

So, you got 10% of 100 homes, 100 apartments or condominiums. That's 10 units, but guess what? What are families ... What is a family? Family of three or four people, or more. The units they provide are usually one bedroom, or, what is it called? They have no bedrooms, efficiencies.

TCU: Yeah.

Rivera: So, guess who they're building for? They're not building for the familia [inaudible 00:02:54], grandpa, and grandma, and three grandchildren. They can't live in there. Not only that, the affordable house is about two or three hundred thousand dollars, so I can't live there. So, it's affordable to whom, is the question? It's affordable to the single, white hipster that works in one of these high tech companies, Google, [inaudible 00:03:23], whatever, here in Austin, that can move in there, because he is one person or just a young hipster couple, and it's perfect because he's right down town, they can ride their bikes, they can go get their fancy coffee down the street, and all of these things that are being built.

They're being built for them, not for us. So, it's a farce to talk about affordability in Austin, Texas when there is no opportunity for poor people to buy, and they say they cannot build houses because of the market today, and a house would cost too much money. Maybe might be affordable to maybe a hipster.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/gilbert-rivera-discusses-affordable-housing-development-in-austin

Part 20 – El Centro De Raza in Seattle Washington:

TCU: As we wrap up, I just wanna maybe end on a little bit more positive note. Tell me about Resistencia Books. Tell me a little bit about how it was founded, and the importance of it within this community.

Rivera: Well, Resistencia was founded in Seattle, Washington, at the Centro de la Raza. And you can actually google Centro de la Raza. They're still around in Seattle. And El Centro was a four-story school building. Big, gigantic school building that was not being used by the Seattle school district. And I came in maybe a year after it was occupied. The local activists decided to occupy it. And when I went to Seattle, that's where I landed, at the Centro de la Raza. And I lived on the third

floor on a mattress in one of the school rooms. And when I went and then somebody says, "Oh, Gilbert, this is Pancho. He's now your roommate." So we slept on the floor on mattresses, and we were occupying the building. And the Centro, as time went on, began ... Finally the city of Seattle, or the school district, said, "Okay. We're giving up the school. It's yours now." So that's how the Centro de la Raza was created.

And the Centro was a place that activists really migrated to. And it was really interesting, because you had Indios, you had African-Americans, you had Filipinos, you had Vietnamese and all types of people, because unlike Austin, Seattle was very metropolitan. You had people from all over the world. Here in Austin when I left, it was you were black or brown or white. And basically very seldom did any of those three mix. So when you went over there, it was great.

And the Resistencia Bookstore was one of the things that was developed out of there. The Centro also had a daycare center. It had a cafeteria when I was there. It had a printing press. And we put out a newspaper called [Spanish 00:02:57]. And what we were doing, we were train ... That's where I worked primarily. And we were training migrant workers from eastern Washington that were moving into the big city a trade. We were training them how to read printers and so forth. And the Centro started getting money, provide social services, ESL programs and so forth.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/gilbert-rivera-discusses-el-centro-del

Part 21 – Resistencia Bookstore and Its Place in the Community:

Rivera: Raul Salinas was an instructor ... excuse me, an instructor at the University of Washington and I was a student. And so he and a couple of other people started the La Resistencia book store. The Resistencia book store was basically what you see now.

When he came back to Austin he brought the idea of the bookstore, the original Resistencia still existed over there, but he came back and opened up a Resistencia book store here in Austin. And it has been around and different homes for the last thirty years, nonstop. And it's ... in Seattle, it was, a place where you met a lot of intellectuals: a lot of poets, Royal Chicano Air Force people, I don't know if you are familiar with them.

TCU: No, no.

Rivera: They were ... they did [Spanish 00:01:10] that was one of the people they did. They did posters, incredible posters. Ricardo Sanchez, a poet from El Paso, and all these great poets of the time that were there and so when Raul came back to Austin, he opened up a store and basically the same type of books that you see here were sold over there. But when -

TCU: Could you, for the camera, what type of books are sold here?

Rivera: We sell books that probably, unless it's a progressive book store, you'll never find in many places. We sell a lot of the books that you see are from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual community. We sell a lot of books on African-American history and struggle. We have a section for Chicano feminism, Chicano books about muy miento.

And so, we had people come in here, and they s ...

We had one guy come in and say, "I'm looking for a self-help book".

And it was, "What do you mean, a self-help book?".

"Well I lost my girlfriend, and I need to buy ... I need to get a book about how to build myself up and feel good about myself, a self-help book".

Self-help books, you know what they mean.

And I told him, "We have a lot of self-help books here". And I told him, "Here's one on Chicano power and here's one on knowing your culture and your history ...".

And he said, "That's not a self help book".

"Yes it is, it teaches you about your history, about ... and you feel better about yourself".

He said, "No, that's not what I am looking for". So he left then.

TCU: (laughing)

Rivera: (laughing) and so, these are self-help books, of course they are.

And so, we really believe that this space is a free space. Free from what's around us, free from the capitalist pressure, free from the pressure of gentrification.

Here's where we have poets, we have writers, we have musicians, we have films, we have people that come in and do their thing. They read their poetry, we've got ... we've had ... this has been ... at one point, when it was in another place, we had the [inaudible 00:03:45] Support Committee working out of here.

Leonard was a real good friend of mine, and of Raul's, we knew him when we were in Seattle.

https://crbb.Rivera.edu/clips/gilbert-rivera-discusses-the-resistencia-bookstore-and-it-s-place-in-the-community

Part 22 – Save Our Youth Program:

Rivera: We work with the kids ... We have a program called SOY, Save Our Youth. And so this program is, we go into Gardner Betts Juvenile Detention Center, and basically where they hold the teenagers that are in trouble, teenage jail there in Austin.

And we go in there and we do writing sessions with them, we talk about self-esteem. And so we help them ... There's a lot of anger. And so we help them write. They say, "Well, I don't know how to write poetry or anything." It doesn't matter. Just write. Write your feelings. Write about what you're thinking. Write about this, because ... And or, "Well, I know how to draw." Okay, well draw. Draw whatever you want. And so the idea is to provide them an outlet for whatever is in them that is angry or feelings about their families and what may have ... Things that may have caused them to wind up in the situation they're in. We've had 11- and 12-year-old little girls write about being prostitutes at 11 and 12 years old. We've had kids talk about how they were beaten by their families and not loved. Okay, write about that.

And so what's really beautiful about that is that we also get them permission to come out of there. And there's a mural in the front of the bookstore, if you all wanna videotape it. That mural was done by the Save Our Youth, by a bunch of kids out of Gardner Betts. And if you look at it, it talks about all of their feelings. One part of the mural shows this dark gray building that looks like a prison. And it's got a hand sticking out with a balloon. They have a hand and the balloon way on top of the air. And the kid that drew it, I said, "What is that?" He said, "That's my school." And he says, "And that's me trying to get out. And that's me, the balloon, free." It's like, "Whoa." You go, "Wow. That's powerful."

And so that's our goal, is to get these kids to express themselves in a positive way that they hopefully can turn themselves around. And we've had several of them that come at later years, in their twenties and older, that walk through the bookstore. And they say, "I remember when you all came." So it's like a teacher in high school or school that their former student comes back to them and says thank you. Doesn't happen very often. So for us, if somebody comes in and says, "You helped me back in those days ..." And I've had people tell me that when they were little and they come and say, "You don't remember me 'cause ..." And I say, "I don't even recognize you." And say, "Well, I'm so-and-so, and you helped me when I was 14 years old." But that is what this story's about.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/gilbert-rivera-discusses-the-save-our-youth-program

Part 23 – Peace with Dignity Journey:

Rivera: We also... this was the organizing place for the Ayotzinapa massacre. 42 students that were disappeared in Mexico. They had a national caravan and this was one of the little national organizing places where we brought their parents to talk about what happened to the children in Mexico.

This is also one of the races for the Peace with Dignity Journey, which is a Native American journey that happens every four years and they're right now... people start running from Alaska and the tip of South America and they run up and they run down and they meet in Central America.

This happens every four years and the goal is... the idea is that when the world was founded, was born, according to indigenous legend, that the condor and the eagle had a big fight and the condor went to South America and the eagle went to North America and that condor and the eagle represent the natives. So that every four years, the condor and the eagle fly to each other, in this case run to each other and connect somewhere in the middle. That connection brings the Native American, the indigenous people together in harmony and it creates a time of peace and awareness of our struggles of the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

So that happens every year and it's on right now. People have already started running from Alaska and started running from Latin America. I think in November, sometimes it's November the people from Alaska will be running through Austin. Then they'll be running through San Antonio and what happens is they're coming from Alaska, they're coming from the east coast, from middle of the Minnesota and so forth. They're coming from people from Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, they're running. They're coming to Florida then running from there. The Eastern indigenous tribes from New York and so forth and they're all coming through here and here, where they connect. And then they head on through Mexico and Panama and so forth.

So this is a place that welcomes that because it's a place that is for humanity. And if you look we put up hearts with the rainbow flag. And that's in remembrance of the 50 people that were killed in Orlando. So we have indigenous ceremonies outside. We burn [inaudible 00:03:32], we burn incense. We dance, we have Native American ceremonies and so we work at keeping our culture and the history.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/gilbert-rivera-discusses-the-peace-with-dignity-journey

Part 24 – Conclusion:

Rivera: ... so all of that is really a very important, because it ... Going back to what I originally said is, when did we, the most of us that started the Brown Berets and other organizations, when did we actually begin to feel good about ourselves? It's when we began to realize that we're a nation, a group of indigenous people, and

that caused us to have pride in ourselves and our culture and our language and our history.

And before then, most of us were, we were all taught that we're Americans and we were really brainwashed to believe that the only good thing was white America and their history. And we always tell people, "You know, when you read about history, remember that it's 'his story' and not our story." And so we are constantly talking about in order to be a strong human being, you have to go out.

The first thing you have to do is really love yourself, and that caring for yourself radiates out to other people. And that caring also translates into you caring for somebody else. Because if you're not aware of who you are and where you came from, you're not going to, from my perspective, you're not going to get very far. You may make a lot of money in life. You may be very successful you might think and what you believe, but if you don't have those roots, it's just very, I would think, it would be very difficult. And you live very isolated.

No matter what color, no matter how educated you get, how much money you make, when you open the door, the dominant society looks at you as a brown person. It doesn't look at you as how educated you are, if you're a doctor or you're a physicist or you're an astronaut. They see, you know Donald Trump, they see a brown person, and you're a threat to them. And you know what? I'm glad I'm a threat to them. Because as long as I'm here, I want to be a threat to them. Because that means that I'm doing the right thing.

TCU: Well, I think that's a fantastic place to stop unless you have anything else that you'd like to-

Rivera: No. I've meandered all over the place, and I hope some of that makes sense. But it's just, I really believe that what you guys are doing is something that is needed.

There's a couple of things, though, that ... For Austin, Texas there's a, I used to work at a public TV station, and there is a documentary called We Will Always Be Here. It's about East Austin and the tearing down of the whited Lincoln mural. And then there's another one called The Day the Klan Marched, from 1983 when the Ku Klux Klan marched here in Austin, and where three of the Brown Berets in Austin were badly beaten by Austin police. And those are documentaries that are out there somewhere on the Web. But those are really important to get a sense of what's been going on here. Okay.

TCU: Well Mr. Rivera, thank you very much for your time.

Rivera: Thank you.

https://crbb.tcu.edu/clips/gilbert-rivera-conclusion