AUSTIN HISTORY CENTER
ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

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Interviewer: Gloria Espitia
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Abstract: Ernesto Fraga, a descendant of immigrants fleeing the Mexican Revolution, extensively details his life in community organizing and Latino organizations, especially his time with the South Austin Brown Berets. Points of interest include discussion of the first Chicano National Conference-"*La Lomita*"- in Mission Texas, details of protests involving the Brown Berets such as the Anti-Boat Race Demonstrations on April 22, 1978, and the foundation of several Latino newspapers across the state of Texas. In addition to all this, Fraga also details the foundation of several community organizations such as the Mexican American Youth Organization, the Alliance of Mexican American Organizations, the South Austin Community Center, El Centro Chicano, among many others that played pivotal roles in the visibility and fight for rights of Latino people in Texas.

Transcript

GLORIA ESPITIA:	Gloria Espitia, Mexican American Community Archivists at the Austin History Center and today is Saturday June 15, 2013. We are in the Holt reception room of the Austin History Center and I have the pleasure of interviewing today Mr. Ernesto Fraga who was once a member of the Austin Brown Berets and then also lived here in Austin. Mr. Fraga welcome.	0:00:00

ERNESTO FRAGA: Thank you for having me here Gloria.

ESPITIA: Thank you. Before we start I need to ask you if you allow me to do this interview on behalf of the Austin History Center.

FRAGA: Yes I do and thank you.

ESPITIA: Great. Let us start with some of the very basic questions that I need to ask you and first of all if you can spell your full name for transcription purposes.

FRAGA: My name is Ernesto Fraga. E-R-N-E-S-T-O F-R-A-G-A.

ESPITIA: Okay and next question for you is, where were you born and can you also give us a little background about you and your family.

FRAGA: My family has been in Waco for 100 years since the Mexican Revolution when my grandparents fled to Texas in 1910. Because some of the family would go work the factories half of the family would work the cotton fields in the Waco area and the other part of the family would go to Chicago to work in the factories. For that reason I was the only one out of seven siblings that was born in Chicago. I was raised with a step-father who was in the U.S. Army for twenty-one years and I was raised an Army brat. That means that I didn't get to live in Waco my first few years of my life. We traveled from military base to military base from Virginia all the way to Hawaii when it became the fiftieth state in 1959. When my step-father whose name was Vicente Martinez Jr retired in 1963 we returned to Waco where I started meeting all of my family, my cousins and I got to join many of them working in the cotton fields at that time, working as a bus boy, entering school. The schools were still segregated at the time so we had a lot or problems with the public school at the time. I got into a lot of fights for people who would say they didn't like Mexicans—but Waco is my hometown and that's where I was raised and graduated from high school and entered college at McLennan Community College.

ESPITIA: How did you get involved politically? What was the main thrust of you becoming involved, becoming an activists?

FRAGA: I left home when I was seventeen, I was still in the eleventh grade we had a dysfunctional family with a lot of problems and I lived with a couple of roommates. One a Vietnam veteran and one a Baylor student, Baylor University student, Manuel Zistayta and Roberto

Aguilar. It was at that time that I was employed—somebody recommended me for the NYC program, Neighborhood Youth Corp a War on Poverty program for youth. I started working for that program, organizing youth and children in the barrios in south Waco and part of my project was to organize a Jr. LULAC organization that included students from the different high schools and McLennan Community College. I became president right away with about eighty students that were organized and within one year got elected to state director. At the same time things were changing, a lot of things were happening not just in Waco but throughout the United States and Texas. There were walkouts occurring for better conditions in the public schools and for the right to have Mexican American history taught in the public schools.

We organized a MAYO chapter, Mexican American Youth Organization an off shoot of the original organization that was started at St. Mary's University in San Antonio and with that MAYO chapter organizing the youth we also organized all of the organizations in WACO from the churches to the social organizations to LULAC, PASO, and with two members of each organization we formulated the Alliance of Mexican American Organizations. It became one of the most powerful organizations Waco has ever had of Mexican Americans because we started forcing every hiring entity to start hiring Mexicanos who were not being hired before. Many people in today's world can say they retired from the U.S. Postal Service or the Bell Telephone Company all because we made the effort to get their names turned in to get hired by the companies. That was the beginning of my political life, I was still a teenager and as soon as I graduated from Waco High School in 1968 I got hired by EOAC, Economic Opportunity Advancement Corporation and the title of my job position was community organizer. My job was to organize communities to teach people to help themselves, to organize themselves, to learn how to go before school boards, city councils, boards and commissions, to represent the needs and interests of Mexicanos in our community.

ESPITIA: And you were still a teenager?

FRAGA: I was still a teenager, yes. The Alliance of Mexican Americans which I helped to found at the time had me on the board of directors and I was the secretary so I got to document a lot of what we were doing so I had a real interest in documentation. One of the projects that we did as MAYO members was to start a barrio newspaper called, *El Golpe Avisa* some of the people I worked with were Ramsey Muñiz who later went on to become the candidate for governor for the *Raza Unida Party*. Rolando Arreola who eventually

went on to become the Mayor of Waco, and several other people that became leaders in the community. These were the people that I was hanging around—I was one of the youngest compared to all of them and I was very proud to be a part of the beginning of the Chicano Movement in the Waco area.

One of the things that we did while we were organizing was to join the Economy Furniture strike march that was being held in Austin at that period of time. So we got to join the march on Congress Avenue, I met leaders like Lencho Hernandez and Lio Hernandez who are a part of the Economy Furniture strike and I would later go on to work with them when I moved to Austin in 1970. That's when I received a job working with the Human Opportunities Corporation, a part of the same agency on the War on Poverty the Office of Economic Opportunity. Within a short while I was hired as the center director of the South Austin Community Center, some of the things that we did there was organize a South Austin Brown Beret organization. Some of the things that we did is we worked in the campaign to elect Richard Moya being the first county commissioner of Travis County and we worked in coalition building with the African American community and student leadership of the University of Texas and St. Edwards University. I remember working with Larry Jackson who is considered a militant African American Austin Community United Front. Velma Roberts who was the leader of the Welfare Rights Organization. All of this at the age of twenty—was working with these people in community organizing efforts. One of the things that we worked on as Brown Berets of South Austin at the time was police brutality. We had a caseload of cases of people who were abused or beaten by the police and when we hear that the person by the name of Gilbert Rivera had been brutalized at one of the nightclubs in Austin we made contact with him. I don't know whether he made contact with us or we made contact with him, I don't remember but we joined him in a hearing at the Austin City Council to support him in his case against police brutality. Gilbert Rivera was a new friend and an ally of ours at the time so one of the things we did was we invited him to join the Brown Berets and I gave him my brown beret and asked him if we could expand our group and organize on the East Side. It didn't take very long for Gilbert to be the founder of the East Austin Brown Berets. That's when a lot of people's memories get started on the Brown Berets in Austin.

ESPITIA: Where in South Austin were you'll located?

FRAGA: We had a—well my office was at the South Austin Community Center on South 1st Street.

ESPITIA: South 1st. 0:10:00

FRAGA: Pretty close to Oltorf.

ESPITIA: Okay because a lot of—when you think of the Brown Berets or a lot of the activism that was going on you really don't hear much about South Austin, you hear it about East Austin so this is a good thing that it's being mentioned or at least for me because now we know.

FRAGA: Well one of the things that we did at the time was since we already knew Lencho Hernandez and Lio Hernandez we worked close together with them on many issues and campaigns. To do that we got to know Marcelo Tafoya who had a radio programing for Mexicanos in Spanish and he also had a person by the name of Zeke Romo who was editor of the *Echo* newspaper in East Austin. During that period of time we were working with Zeke Romo to get a lot of our information out, you know through the *Echo* newspaper. I have no idea what he may have documented about us at the time but I do know that once the East Austin Brown Berets got started I was already working with him. I had already been working with *La Fuerza* in South Austin so I continued working with *El Echo* in East Austin and started documenting and encouraging other people to write for the *Echo* newspaper to put a lot of our issues and causes into the paper.

ESPITIA: In which they did, I mean there is a lot of good information about what was going on in East Austin. About the Brown Berets, their poems, I mean pictures, all kinds of information that I really when I first started to see the paper doing the research for other things I was really impressed because I ventured to say that the majority of all those individuals, maybe Zeke I think maybe for the exception of Zeke who had gone to UT and I believe was in journalism or was going into that area but the others really didn't have that formal training to you know—

FRAGA: That's true while we have to keep in mind at that time I was twenty years old and so when the East Austin Brown Berets got stared many of those members were still just fresh out of high school they were eighteen or nineteen years old. My memory brings Gabino Fernandez and Zeke Uvalle and Elias Mendez who were all still in their late teens. So the experience with working with barrio newspapers in my case dated back to *El Golpe Avisa* in Waco, Texas. The other thing that I think is important to note and this isn't just Waco or Austin but when we organized MAYO in the late-sixties we wore brown berets and we wore khaki jackets and we

wore arm bands that had the insignia of the United Farm Workers which was *la aguila negra*. So when we had our first Chicano national conference in Mission, Texas called *La Lomita* we got to meet many MAYO members from Houston, from El Paso, from all over the nation, many who wore brown berets and khaki shirts. So we were impressed with the brown beret look as organizers of the community. One of the leaders of the south Texas was Pablo Delgado who I am still very much in touch with and we talked about the fact that we need to organize Brown Berets. There was already a large chapter in the making in San Antonio at the time, many of them whom we met and many of them of course were MAYO members as well because according to Dr. David Montejano the Brown Berets evolved from the MAYO chapters in San Antonio. So that was also true in Waco and so after *La Lomita* when we organized the winter garden project that was the beginning of the *Raza Unida* party MAYO became a political organization that started becoming *Raza Unida* and they started getting into electoral politics. The Brown Berets took off where MAYO left off where the cadre of community organizing, to organize pickets and marches and confrontations against police brutality and injustices in the community. So that's what the Brown Berets did, we took over where MAYO left off in community organizing.

ESPITIA: With the Brown Berets when it was formed here in Austin there weren't very many members according to Dr. Montejano I believe there was like eighteen members. How did you'll really—I mean because in what I read, in the papers and with Dr. Montejano's books and all, how did you manage to get just a small group of people really get out into the community and get the community involved in causes.

FRAGA: Well there's two points to make about David Montejano at the time as we knew him, he was a person who would hang around with us and he'd carry a camera, he'd always be writing notes. We always wondered about him at the time but the Brown Berets were an organizing group, we were organizers. What we did was we built coalitions and some of us worked with housing, some of us worked with media like I did, and some of us worked with other causes like police brutality. So what we did in order to get some community action going is we organized coalitions, we built coalitions and one of the coalition building that we did was the East Austin Committee for Justice. This East Austin Committee for Justice was a Brown Beret project that would bring in African American and student and other community people amongst them was Juan Hipolito who had been in the original South Austin Brown Berets. He is now—he later went on to become a lawyer and move to California. What we did

was we had the East Austin Committee for Justice present itself before city council and press conferences to show that it was not just a small little group demanding justice or calling on the issues of the day but it was a wide spectrum of the community.

ESPITIA: We are very fortunate here at the Austin History Center that we do have that collection and going through the documentation not too long ago I managed to find one of the individuals that was a member and was participating in that and she's from Victoria, Lilia Zevata and I was sort of like, but she was supposed to be going to UT getting a degree and then she went on to Harvard and became a lawyer and the first Latina lawyer in Victoria and here I'm seeing her being involved.

FRAGA: Yeah I am so proud of her and there are other people that I need to mention. Gabe Gutierrez who was an attorney at the time was the attorney that I reached out too at the time to help us with our legal advice. He had a young attorney Malcolm Greenstein that was working at his office who eventually became the designated Brown Beret attorney for years to come. There are many stories of our actions with the Brown Berets where Malcolm Greenstein played a key role in working with this and Lilia of course that you mentioned was a part of our East Austin Committee for Justice. We would sometimes meet at her house and we would move our meetings from different places and so we had the community mobilized beyond the Brown Berets at that time.

ESPITIA: Which is an interesting thing too because I mean Gabe Gutierrez still continues you know to practice and so does Mr. Greenstein.

FRAGA: Malcolm Greenstein, yes.

ESPITIA: And so that is the interesting thing also. Another intriguing thing for me—and we go back to the age of each of the members, very young, very young, but we also remember the time period. The time period Civil Rights, the time period of the Vietnam War, the time period of *La Raza Unida*, MAYO and all of that was going on so the voices really started to get louder and louder and the students at the university, which is amazing also were also wanting to be involved in things that you know—so that is the one impressive thing about this project is we're finding out and it hasn't been really fully documented until now as we're doing this research and the articles that we are finding is what I interoperate as being recovering and reclaiming that history. So that now we will have it in the document form so that others can come in and have access to it and hopefully 0:20:00

someday write a book or whatever. Go beyond what Dr. David Montejano.

FRAGA: That's true, David Montejano knows more about the San Antonio Brown Berets then what he really knew about other Brown Beret groups so there are a lot of inaccuracies in his books that is not as important as the fact that he was around us when we were carrying out a lot of this and he put a lot of that information including some of our newspapers into the archives of Yale University. My daughter Fuerza Linda Fraga went to Yale and called my wife Linda one day in around the year 2000 and said, Mama do you know that there used to be a *Golpe Alvisa* in *el Coraje Chicano* in the Waco area. And she says, Yes mija that was your papa that did that. And we were just amazed that—we believe that David Montejano was the one that put them at the archives at Yale University.

ESPITIA: Can you tell us just real quickly sort of how you named your daughter?

FRAGA: Yes, Fuerza Linda was born in South Texas in Weslaco during the time that we were occupying *el Colegio Jacinto Treviño* this was in 1978. Nineteen seventy-eight was one of the most pivotal years of our organizing statewide and Linda and I were working *el Colegio Jacinto Treviño* to save it from developers who wanted to sell the land a piece at a time. We brought in a lawyer from Houston to take people to court who were doing this and we actually won in court to preserve the land which was about thirty-three acres of *el Colegio Jacinto Treviño.* We wound up using a lot of the land for farming and we let people actually grow crops there and we would teach classes of Chicano history. But we used it as a base for organizing all over the state of Texas and we actually did use that as a base to organize *marchas* throughout the state of Texas in 1978. The culmination of the year 1978 by December 2nd our daughter was born. We named her Fuerza Linda, she is now an attorney working for a federal district judge in Las Vegas. She graduated from the University of Texas after having graduated from Yale and she was a product of the Chicano Movement.

ESPITIA: I found that very interesting when you submitted to me your little chronological timeline about yourself and your family so I just wanted to be sure that we included it in this interview. Now let's go back to the *Echo* and let's—there was the Centro Chicano and maybe—first of all let's talk about el Centro Chicano and how it got started.

FRAGA: El Centro Chicano was a project that I give Paul Hernandez all the credit for. He was from Austin when I was not, he had the contacts of people including funding sources and right there at the Centro Chicano I remember several of us who would enter information for the proposal to get funding for the Centro Chicano and I want to show a little picture here of 1974 when during the midst of the police brutality campaign that we had with the East Austin Committee for Justice we had mayor Roy Butler and the city manager and the police chief arrive at a caravan of the city staff hierarchy that arrived at the Centro Chicano to meet with the Brown Berets and the East Austin Committee for Justice. If I can show this to you this has the mayor and some of the city staff and we also had the Brown Berets keeping security. If the camera can see this right at the very top is Zeke Uvalle with a walkie talkie keeping in touch with the others downstairs you know to watch the security throughout the area and we thought that was a very important period of time where the city and the mayor were trying to come up with some proposals for dealing with police brutality. The Centro Chicano of course was a central point for organizing in the East Austin area.

ESPITIA: Now it was—how big was the, because it was a house.

FRAGA: It was a small house really with maybe two or three rooms but we had—if one could walk inside you could see that it had posters and we had telephones, we had tables and chairs, organizing materials and it was just one of the most fascinating things. This is a picture from Alan Pogue's collection of photography from back then and you see this sign right here I like to say I painted this sign that was used in the very front of the Centro Chicano. I wish I knew whatever became of it.

ESPITIA: You know as we're looking at this because one of the—when I did the oral history project on the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Arts Center we have some photographs for an article that Nancy Flores with the *Austin American-Statesman* used. We do, if I remember correctly in the negatives of the *Austin American-Statesman* there is a photograph of you know el Centro Chicano, the sign, but also a lot of the other items because it was located on what was it on San Marcos Street?

FRAGA: Yeah it was actually 105 San Marcos Street just off of East 1st Street. It was really accessible at the time.

ESPITIA: Yeah and it was used for a lot of things. I mean a lot of good things that were happening or what they were wanting—in particularly for the youth.

FRAGA: Yes, we even had a *Cinco de Mayo* festival there. We closed off the street, had over a 1,000 people there and the community treated el Centro Chicano as their own.

ESPITIA: Well one of the things and it is in the *Echo* and I want to give it to you so that this way you can see sort of show it. One of the things that Ramon Montejano—

FRAGA: David Montejano?

ESPITIA: No.

FRAGA: Oh Ramon.

ESPITIA: Ramon. Had told me about was the glue sniffing that had been one of his things that you know as a youth he would do things like that and so he went to el Centro Chicano and they helped him.

FRAGA: That's right.

ESPITIA: Considerably so that was the thing it was like you know a lot of these young people if they had not have been for Centro Chicano they say you know they wouldn't be what they are today.

FRAGA: That's true, one thing that I would really like to say about the history and legacy of the Brown Berets is when people would try to carry a cause we had this saying that no Chicano needs to struggle for justice alone. As a matter of fact what we would do is we would make sure that if people had no other way if they had exhausted every other means people always knew that they could come to the Brown Berets to see it to the end.

ESPITIA: Again we do have photographs of the Centro when it got burned down and also a lot of the contents couldn't be salvaged so that was another thing also. Now tell us about the 1977 when you were, well I guess you went back to Waco or how were you—which is another thing also just ask this question, how did you'll manage to go from location to location or chapter to chapter throughout the state, how did you'll do that?

FRAGA: Well that was one of the responsibilities that I would say was a self-appointed responsibility of mine really, in my case anyways. Brown Berets made it a point to make alliances with all the other chapters in Texas and we were all in autonomous groups unlike the California original Brown Berets. The Texas group had met before and voted

that we did not want a centralized office or a centralized *jefe* or dues or anything like that. We all chose to be autonomous groups. I was privileged to be able to not just help in organizing the Austin Brown Berets but to go to Waco in 1974 and organize the Brown Berets in Waco. That's when we started the newspaper *El Coraje Chicano*—me and Susana Renteria were together at that time for those three or four years. In 1977 after having organized many events in Waco I moved back to Austin in 1977 and I got to work with a project called AVID, Aid for Victims In Distress, the title of my job was a crisis intervention specialist because I had already had several years of working as a counselor and therapist in crisis intervention worker with mental health and mental retardation in Austin. 0:30:00

So in 1977 when I moved back to Austin we started immediately working on other campaigns, there were many meetings between myself and Paul Hernandez and Martine Delgado who was from San Antonio Brown Berets and one of the first things we started organizing was a statewide march to the capital on police brutality. This was in commemoration of the one year anniversary of famed case of Jose Campos Torres who had been killed a year earlier in Houston by the Houston city police. By that time there were many other cases that had come up throughout the state of Texas where people had died at the hands of police. We organized this march to the state capital and we started working on other projects amongst them was to confront the issue of the ku klux klan that wanted to patrol the borders. They themselves wanted to arrest what they called the illegal aliens and one funny thing that we thought was that they had this little poster that they would put on the posters that would say illegal aliens not welcome however it was in English. I don't know who they expected to read that. (both laugh) We had a press conference at the federal court house and we declared that we would confront the ku klux klan wherever they would show up for the defense and protection of Mexicanos anywhere on the border.

One of the projects we did with other Brown Beret groups was to organize at least two caravans one from the Lubbock area and one from the Austin area that was committed to go to south Texas and seek out the ku klux klan and we only wanted to find one of them really. During the period of time there was a—the first national conference on immigration reform that was held in San Antonio and Paul and Martine and I representing the Brown Berets stood before some three thousand people and announced the caravan that was going to be organized to go to South Texas to confront the ku klux klan. Not very long after that Louis Beam of the national ku klux klan organization announced on radio that he was afraid that if they would turn in any illegal aliens that they would be notifying the

Brown Berets so they called off their so called patrols of the borders of Texas and moved to another state.

ESPITIA: I think I've seen some photographs of that conference and I think the three of you are standing together, I can't remember if—I don't think it was from Dr. Montejano's book but I have seen—I think it was when I googled I came across that. Tell us about—let's go to April 22, 1978 where individuals, about nineteen individuals were arrested and assaulted in the anti-boat race.

FRAGA: The boat races at that time was a very hot issues, Paul Hernandez was making that one of his pet issues because he was involved in barrio neighborhood associations even members of his own family would be complaining about the tourism that was invading our barrios during those boat races. It really had more to do with self-determination of our barrios, the preservation of our barrios, a lot of people miss understood what was our beef with boat races per say. It was really about preserving our barrios, to be in control of our own community and on that day of April 22 the Brown Berets organized a march from the east side to Town Lake close to the bridge on I35. One of the things that happened we were very fortunate that a person by the name of Jim Lutz was videotaping that march, that manifestation that we had and he was able to capture on video that the police actually deliberately came face to face with our picketers and actually assaulted—and pulling people from the picket line into the street which caused a chaos because one person, one Beret after another was trying to protect the other.

Before it was over even plain clothed police as we found out were carrying very large nightsticks and as soon as people would be handcuffed, myself included, they would be hitting us on the head and on the arms and one of the people who received a lot of injuries you know from this assault was Paul Hernandez. Even with his injuries, even after we were all put in jail Paul Hernandez and his brother Sam refused to cooperate with finger printing and they chose to get on a hunger strike while the rest of us had already been let go and freed from the jail and here was where Malcolm Greenstein our attorney eventually before the court was able to have a lot of the charges dropped. I have to hand it to Paul Hernandez and Sam who continued that hunger strike and kept the issue alive on a day to day basis. One of the things that we did during that time was try to organize the community to support us even after that assault took place and rather than intimidate us we were able to generate yet another march.

This is a picture that came out in the *Daily Texan* this is myself right here talking to people with picket signs at the University of Texas who are all being recruited to join us in this fight against encroachment of the East Austin community and the parts that followed that one that was in the news about police brutality brought out thousands of people from the community from all sides of Austin. This is where we started seeing that we were not alone in this.

ESPITIA: Right, and that is the amazing thing also is that just about every march, every you know area that you'll were at there's always lots of people and again that intrigues me is you go back to, they were just a small number of members but yet because of what was going on the impact that it was having and at the time period a lot of the young people and so forth wanting to say, Hey you can't do this. So they were demonstrating and they were supporting. With the Emma Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center oral history project you hear about—you get it from Roland Salinas, Vilma Sanchez Ruiz talks about marching with the Brown Berets and all. I mean a number of these individuals, Francis Martinez also you know supporter of the Brown Berets and definitely Paul Hernandez whose name has always come up.

FRAGA: Of course, yes.

ESPITIA: As one of those individuals that stood for his rights and was out there all the time.

FRAGA: I think something that is very important for people to understand about our organizing of that period of time is that people would only have the media like the *Austin-Statesman* or the television or radio to get information about what was happening. What they did not know 0:40:00
is that our tactics and our form of organizing was actually filled with strategy. Many of us, myself included even Paul and Gilbert Rivera were actually trained in Saul Alinsky type organizing. The very same type of organizing that Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez had studied at the Saul Alinsky institute. Because I was on the War on Poverty programs and because Paul Hernandez was a union organizer we learned a lot of these Saul Alinsky tactics where we would teach people to win little victories and put one victory at a time and people loved to join winners, they especially like to see a campaign continue, that we don't give up and we see it through till the very end. Some of the tactics that we used in the Saul Alinsky training was used in the boat race demonstrations in this boat race demonstration that happened with—this was probably the last one that we had before the boat races were called off by the city council

what we were doing is we were using legal tactics to thwart the people from actually entering but we had cars that were deliberately being stalled and we'd stop the car and we'd open up the hood and it would cause long long lines of people. Many of these tactics were actually causing the entrance to the boat races to be stalled for long periods of time and it was very obvious to the city and to all the organizers that yes this was being done deliberately but we were not breaking the law. These were Saul Alinsky tactics that we were using that on the one hand were effective and on the other hand were not illegal that would cause people like the police to attack innocent citizens and bystanders.

ESPITIA: Well that was a good tactic, now I haven't read that information I mean you know—

FRAGA: So a lot of people did not know this, they don't know that many of our tactics that we used throughout the years were actually planned and we knew exactly what we were doing. We knew exactly what the result was going to be. We knew that to use Saul Alinsky tactics we didn't use the media, if we didn't have the media reporting on what we had already prepared it would be like none of these things happened so not only were the tactics important but we had to learn how to use the media and that's why I'm in the media now as it is because we couldn't rely on the mainstream media if they didn't publicize or report on the truth we had newspapers like *el Echo* or other newspapers that we organized during the Chicano Movement that would put them on the spot. They would see that they did not report everything or not the whole truth.

ESPITIA: Well I know *The Rag* was one that would get out there and document a lot of what was going on. *The Sun* was another.

FRAGA: That's right.

ESPITIA: And so there were—and the *Daily Texan* wanted to get out there. But again that information it is not indexed so people have to sit and look at, unless they specifically know that they know the date that it took place or whatever they're going to have to look. They're going to have to research very carefully in order to be able to find that information but they can't. I know *The Sun*, I believe it was *The Sun* that had a wonderful article on Elias and his and his little boy at the time and Elias had long hair and everything and all of a sudden I'm reading this and it's very you know it was very well written but it is information. One of the things also that I want to ask you about is the involvement of little children and the family within the Brown Berets because again they were family members, a number of them that

were members of the Brown Berets you know the Hernandez for instance.

FRAGA: Exactly.

ESPITIA: And there're other, Adela I think Mancias, Salas you know Joan and her family. So can you tell us a little bit about that how it was—a lot of things that were going on it was always family, always the children.

FRAGA: Well that is one of the facts and truths about Brown Beret organizing is that it was a family oriented, family based community organizing effort. I have to point out that many times and very often the women are not given the credit that they are due for organizing or for being right in the middle of the community action that took place. At that time there was Susana Renteria, Joanne Salas, there were a lot of people, Sylvia Ledesma, we had Ines Hernandez who was part of our Brown Beret movement although she wasn't a Brown Beret but she was a part of our Brown Beret movement. Many of these people have throughout the years become very well-known people in the community. Two of them of course who got their doctorate and Susana of course for many years has been not just a founder but been one of the organizers of the PODER in Austin that has been carried out to carry out the same principles of organizing families in the Austin community.

ESPITIA: That's an interesting point that you just brought up because as I have researched and read Dr. Montejanos books and so forth and gotten to know some of these individuals themselves it is amazing and another thing it's very intriguing to me how they manage. I mean Zeke U—with a U.

FRAGA: Zeke Uvalle.

ESPITIA: Uvalle is now the dean of student services in California. Even with Gilbert Rivera who was marching against the city and you know going before city council and all of that he's got a degree but at the same time he was employed by the city later on and retired from the city. So there's lots of other individuals too and that is the thing it's like you know they went on regardless of what people would have thought about them back in the seventies and early eighties. They still were very much involved with their community and continued to be.

FRAGA: That's exactly right, many Brown Berets I can just talk about just the Austin group. If you were to describe a former Brown Beret today

they could probably be an administrator, a lawyer, at least two that I know of became lawyers, a documentarian, a publisher, a business man, so many of the Brown Berets continued in their own ways to be part of the difference making in their communities.

ESPITIA: One of the things if you can discuss a little bit about the manifesto, the Brown Berets manifesto and how it became—that it was written and what it really meant to the Austin Brown Berets as well as other chapters.

FRAGA: The Brown Beret manifesto was a necessary thing to write at the time as I mentioned earlier we resisted being organized as a centralized office we voted to remain as autonomous groups. The Valley and South Texas which consisted of so many cities, Pharr, Weslaco, McAllan, they were autonomous. The Lubbock chapter was autonomous, the San Antonio chapter was autonomous, the Waco chapter was autonomous, and especially the Austin group. But one thing that we did need was a manuscript that would at least write down the points that we would stand for. That we all supported each other for, it was not a rare thing and it was very common thing that whenever a group whether it was Austin or South Texas or Houston, whenever we organized a march that was bringing up a big important issue all of the Brown Beret chapters from around the state would join in that march. That's why one of Alan Pogue's pictures of a 1974 march, Paul Hernandez organized that went all the way to mayor Roy Butler's house showed many Brown Beret members from around Texas that were a part of that march because we were all supportive of each other.

In 1974 which was July 7, 1974 Susana and I actually played a part in writing the initial notes for what we called the Brown Beret manifesto and presented it to all the chapters in Houston. Some of them actually came as far as Colorado and we spent the whole weekend going point by point to state in writing what we would stand for and everybody had input in it. We had a four point statement on police oppression, we had a statement on economics, we had a statement on immigration way back in 1974 and a seven point statement on education, housing which was one of the key issues that Susana was very interested in at that period of time, prison reform, medical needs, and even media, the importance of media with the Brown Berets. So all of this, all of this skills, all of the successes that we had we would share with all of the other Brown Beret chapters so that everybody could be in sync in how we would be operating state wide. 0:50:00

ESPITIA: The thing that Montejano mentions in the book that the Austin chapter had its act very much together because you managed. He makes a little chart of the different Brown Beret chapters and the Austin chapter had headquarters they had, they were involved with politics and so forth and then they were you know—and so that was the point that I was again as I look at that I thought going back and remembering the age of the members at the time and how they really were I guess you'll were learning as you were going along but you were meeting lots of other people also.

FRAGA: Yes that's true. Not only were many of the Brown Berets very young but many of them were in college like some of them were coming out of high school but they were continuing their studies. But at the same time we weren't alone in organizing the communities, it's very important to note that there was a women's organization, a women's movement that was taking place at the time also for many women leaders. Martha Cortera who had been one of the founders of *Raza Unida* we had the blessing of having people like her in the Austin area. Many of the community people who were running for office, we were working together with them. We worked with Gonzalo Barrientos, we worked with the city council races, not as a Brown Beret organization but as individuals when it came to electoral politics. We were working with every movement, whoever was doing something for the community that includes the arts, that includes mural painting that includes music that includes writings like poetry, if anybody was doing anything for the community we supported them or we were all part of the unison of the movement at the time.

ESPITIA: Which is another thing too that the oral history on the MACC brought out was that the Brown Berets which informed LUChA which then went on and el Centro Chicano was part of then later one the Quintanilla house on the you know—and then of course everything that was going on in the arts. Everything that you said that was going on with entertainment and so forth.

FRAGA: Exactly.

ESPITIA: Again it goes back to Museo del Barrio you know, Museo del Barrio which is another thing that we have very little information on and only those individuals that were involved with it at the time remember but again that is very important to know that things like that would not have taken place and again when you go back to Flor y Canto some of the individuals that had you know been involved with LUChA and all also were involved with Flor y Canto the first one here in Austin which actually was what in 1974 I think. The first

one took place in California and then here and that had the school district involved and churches involved, the university involved and so a lot of thing, a lot of things that stem from this particular group of individuals and what they were doing.

FRAGA: You talk about age, Gabino Fernandez and Zeke Uvalle and Elias that Gilbert Rivera organized one of the first things that they did as young men was organize the issue of the education in our public schools and to call attention to the studies at the Johnson High School to call attention to the lack of education opportunities in that school. They proposed to change the name to Emiliano Zapata High School. That's what caught the attention of both sides opposing and pro sides that caused to have a long drawn out hearing with the school board where people not just Brown Berets like Gabino and Elias and Zeke would go before the microphone but the people from all sides from the community were immediately involved in an issue that dealt with education. You had to think, this is what some of these people were doing at a very young age, getting the whole community involved in very serious matters.

ESPITIA: Alright now we've fast forward and it's been what nearly forty years since then you'll set it up, the Brown Berets. Some of the individuals will talk about the past, I know that when we did the story corp when they came here to the history center I had Gilbert Rivera and Elias Mencias talk about you know the Brown Berets and then I had Belinda Acosta who is a journalist here in Austin for the *Austin Chronical* she interviewed Maria Limon and she talked about the police brutality, what had happened to them with the KKK march at the state capital. That was you know part of the beginning but there is always, as I always put it a piece of puzzle that is always being connected to different things throughout. But it is very very good information that you provided us now let me ask you this, is there anything as we look to the future because as I said it's not been forty years, about forty years, but is there anything that you feel that future generations should know about the Berets, about Austin at the time that it was, that all of this was going on. About the people that were involved with the Brown Berets is there anything that maybe we've left out of it should be of importance.

FRAGA: I'd like to point out that we had a lot of functions, security amongst them, we provided security for the Texas farm workers when they had their long march to the Austin capital, even Paul Hernandez being in security during 1977 was stabbed and was injured and we had a benefit for him at Gonzalo Barrientos restaurant where we would bring in people from the community. There was a lot of support but there were a lot of sacrifices that were made. I myself in

1974 was fired by the City of Austin. I was working in city planning at the time and during the lunch hour I went with the Brown Berets to city hall, to a city council meeting calling for the firing of chief Bob Miles. When I got back to work they informed me that I no longer had that job and it came out in the *Austin-Statesman* because one of the things that became an issue there was that we had agencies like EEOC, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to call attention to our freedom of speech. Freedom of speech I think is very crucial in what we were all about, we wanted to teach people to speak for themselves and for that reason we had newspapers that we organized throughout the state of Texas. Newspapers that we had to organize our own selves and this is why even in 1982, by the way these are banners of the newspapers that we organized back then, this one was the MAYO one in Waco. This was the Brown Beret chapter 1:00:00
newspaper *el Coraje Chicano* and this was *Regeneration II* named after *Regeneration*, Ricardo Flores Magón which was organized in San Juan, Texas. For that reason we organized newspapers like *Tiempo Newspaper* when I moved back to Waco in the early 1980s one of the first things that this newspaper did in the very first year was to highlight and investigate police brutality complaints and in this case he had Robert Cervantes whose picture was taken at the hospital showing the bruises all over his face. Inside this paper we show where the squad car has blood all over the back seat and blood on the pavement where we highlighted that we also had brought up the issue of detention centers that are run by private companies that make money out of each person for each day which proves that the whole immigration oppression is an industry that makes money for private companies, retired wardens, retired police officials who actually had stock in these private detention centers.

In Waco, in 2001 shows where there was a riot that took place in the detention center, the immigrant detention center in Waco. We brought up this issue in the year 2000 and because we had the associated press we were able to make this issue into a national, nationwide issue. Since then there have been detention watch organizations all over the country and in 2006 we organized, it was some of the Brown Beret organizers from Austin, Waco, and San Antonio even and in South Texas where some of the people who actually spearheaded the massive marches that were held in Texas that were in unity with the rest of the county where millions of people marched against punitive immigration legislation and for immigration reform. This is a picture of the march we had in Waco in 2006 where we had 4,000 people, for a little town like Waco that's the most people have ever seen of Chicanos marching in a town like that. In Austin they had 40,000 in Dallas they had half a million, in Los Angelo's they had a million, in Chicago where it all started was

a million. The important thing that I'm trying to point out with this is that the legacy of the Brown Berets never ceased to exist it continues to this very day. Not only are we still organizing at our older age but even our own children are now part of the movement but they are also getting further education to carry it to yet another level because we don't feel that the movement ever was over.

We're simply the continuation of a movement that started back in 1848 when half of Mexico's territory was lost to an unjust war between the US and Mexico and a treaty was signed called the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Something that the community still needs to be educated about in our public schools. This treaty actually talks about those of us who stayed in the United States and the descendants that came and chose to become American criticizes who have rights and so we are the decedents, the Brown Berets are decedents of the people who have been struggling for equal rights in the southwest for over 150 years. So what we are saying is that the *movimiento* didn't start in the sixties it started way before that for 500 years when we first were colonized by the Spaniards and resisted colonization. That story continues to this very day when we had over 150 walk outs around the country when students wanted our history to be taught in the public schools, that fight is still taking place because we want the right to have Mexican American studies and universities like the University of Texas and Berkley and all over the country, and Wisconsin. We will have the fight in the public schools, we still have the history that needs to be taught in the public schools about who we are, why we are named Chicano, where did the name Chicano come from, it's the only name that we gave ourselves that the government did not give us. The government came up with the name Hispanic, the government forced us to use the word Latin American, but we gave our own selves the name Chicano to say who we are, the Mexican American descendants of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848. That means that the *movimiento* continues, it's going on today and it continues tomorrow, it will continue with our children and grandchildren. The 11,000,000 people that people have been complaining about immigrants that are in the United States today in my lectures I tell people, even Mexicanos from Mexico, all the 11,000,000 people with their children and their grandchildren are all going to be Chicanos, that's who we're going to be and the *movimiento* Chicano is going through a new life even today with the efforts that you're doing, with these forums that are coming up in October, with lectures that are taking place all over the country, more and more people of a young age of high school and college age are asking about this Chicano Movement, who was it? What was it all about? What do we stand for? That's what we're all about.

ESPITIA: The reason as I said that I decided to do this project is because with every project that I've worked on since I've been here since 2008 it's always been that connection. It's always been that connection and somebody will always mention the Brown Berets and all that was going on and so that was you know it was inevitable that this project was going to get done. One of the simple reason why David Montejano's book came out just at the time that I was already getting started on it, started to read it, and although there are a few pages at least we should be thankful that there are a few pages in that book that do relate to Austin's chapter. Other than that there really hasn't been that much as far as books are concern. Now articles, yes there've been some, also the fact that a lot of students come in asking for information but again if it's not readily available they don't know the time period of what all was going on then you know they are not going to search because they won't know to do that. I mean the commission for instance the other collections that we have here, the *Echo* you know or the *Rag*, or some of these other oral history interviews that we might have but they don't know the people that were involved.

FRAGA: That's true.

ESPITIA: Until just recently I had not seen all of the names of the individuals that were members of the Brown Berets. You would know of Paul Hernandez, of Gilbert Rivera, and just a few but not very many. Now we at least have a list of some of these individuals and that's where we are going to do the interviews on them also because it's important.

FRAGA: That's a very important job.

ESPITIA: The October series that we are going to have with the different programs and so forth there will be a program on the Brown Beret Latina members, at least three of them. We wanted to make sure we included it and that one's going to take at Resistencia bookstore and then also we talked about the boat races and what took place there. We will be showing a documentary that was done also and some of that with some of the images of the police beating some of these individuals.

FRAGA: Right.

ESPITIA: And then of course Gilbert will show his, the march of the KKK in 1983.

FRAGA: And he's a documentarian now.

ESPITIA: Yes, right. So it is what it is with this project is that we are just you know, I could not just settle for one. I had to you know do what I always do, if you're going and you seem to be making an impact then continue at it so four programs in one month plus the photo exhibit at the Terrazas branch library at those photos are going to basically come from a number of members of the Brown Berets at the time that have this information because otherwise we really wouldn't have it. 1:10:00

FRAGA: I think it's also very important Gloria to point out that the Brown Berets actually are still alive to this very day. I am in touch with the Brown Berets from California and from South Texas, San Antonio. The San Antonio Brown Berets are actually active at this time in San Antonio. They're being reorganized in Dallas and they're being reorganized in different parts of the country. A new generation is sprouting up and one thing that is still missing is a document or a book that I hope will be coming out sometime soon that shows the story of the Texas Brown Berets and that is one thing that I hope will be available to our generations to come.

ESPITIA: It is always amazing to me that not very much has been written about this topic but I'm sure that with this information and everything else that is now becoming recovered that there will be something. I guess we're getting ready now to wrap up so is there anything else that you want to close with as far as your interview is concerned.

FRAGA: I'd like to close by saying that there are a lot of you in the community that were a part of this movement that were never mentioned, a part of you in the community that sacrificed either your job or your name or even your health for all of the work that has been done for some many years that people like myself and a lot of us are thinking about you. That your struggle whether you were named in it or not given credit for your struggle is going to be showing in the years to come because it continues because of your efforts.

ESPITIA: And we'll make sure that the October 19 program that will have keynote speaker Dr. David Montejano and the panelist that were some of the members of the Brown Berets that some of those names are also mentioned because that is important. I agree, I agree that it's not just a few there were a number of others and so yes as many names as we can possibly get we will make some type of little poster or whatever that will have those names of those individuals because they do need to be remembered and they need to be recognized.

FRAGA: I think it will be a great service.

ESPITIA: Yes, well I will thank you very much for allowing us to do this interview it has been a very interesting and I mean I'm very honored. Honored in the fact that we have individuals such as yourself that are willing to travel from Waco to Austin and do this but also wanted to be part of it and I do invite you to attend whatever programs that you are able to attend.

FRAGA: I'll look forward to it.

ESPITIA: That take place in October and hopefully I can do justice to this project and but it could not be done without as you said, the community.

FRAGA: That's right.

ESPITIA: And it's their history, it's not mine, I'm just trying to reclaim it for them. So thank you very much, it's been an honor.

FRAGA: Thank you very much Gloria, thank you. I get sentimental when I think about all this stuff, but you know that happens when I do my lectures I have to catch myself you know thinking about all the personalities you know.

ESPITIA: Well you know that is the one thing with me when I do this also. 1:14:45

End of Interview.