AUSTIN HISTORY CENTER
Oral History Center

Interviewee: Dr. Emilio Zamora
Interviewer: Cassie Smith
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Subject Headings: Born in a town of 20 people called The Solis French, where everyone was related. Moved to La Feria and went to school. Avoided the draft but joined the reserves. Wanted to go to law school, but ended up studying history, which he loved. Had a variety of positions around the country, but ended up at UT Austin teaching. Sat on the MACC Advisory Board.
Key Names: Gonzalo Barrientos, Martha Cotera, Marlena Martinez, Inez Hernandez, Gloria Espitia

CASSIE SMITH: This is Cassie Smith and today it is 2:00 on August 17th. I am interviewing Dr. Emilio Zamora and his office at the University of Texas in Austin. And this is being conducted for the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican-American Cultural Center Oral History Project. Dr. Zamora, do you give me permission to record this interview on behalf of the Austin History Center for the Project?

DR. EMILIO ZAMORA: Yes.

SMITH: Okay, could you please state your full name and spell it for us?

ZAMORA: Emilio, E-M-I-L-I-O. Zamora, Z-A-M-O-R-A. Sometimes I go by Emilio Solis Zamora. Solis is my mother's name, S-O-L-I-S.

SMITH: Thank you very much. Okay, we'll start with where you were born and where you grew up.

ZAMORA: I was born in a log cabin — no. [chuckles] I was born in a little rural community of about 20 families, all related. And the place was called The Solis French. All of these people

related to my mother, and they traced their ancestry back to 1749. And we lived there until — I lived there, as well as in my paternal grandparent's home across the river on and off for four years. I was born on June 10, 1946, and in 1955, my family moved from that rural community a mile and a half to the town named La Feria, Texas, a town of 6,000 people. And so I was raised there and went to schools there and graduated from high school in 1964.

SMITH: And what was it like growing up there?

ZAMORA: It was home. On one level, it was just wonderful. It was just wonderful families. I could roam around the whole town and know that my friends' mothers would act like my mother. That is, they would feed me, take care of me. And the fathers would always look out for us. So I always felt that the whole community was home. At the same time, the community was very segregated. We lived on one side of town, and we did not cross the tracks unless we had to. I went to an all Mexican elementary school, and when I went into middle school, they tracked us according to race. And I was fortunate to be placed in one track that ended up being the college-bound track. And the reason I think that they placed me there is because when I attended Sam Houston Elementary School, I was one of the best students there, and I think my light skin shade may have also encouraged some of these people to place me in that one track that was slightly integrated with a sprinkling of Mexicans, light-completed, good students. Everybody else basically took the same courses, but the quality of education was not good. So by the time they — the other track — reached high school, they took home economics and leather crafts and woodwork. And so I was fortunate to find myself in the college track. And my grades were not great, but they were not bad. And I think sports are what inspired me to be competitive. And I had about a B average. I was a good student, but faced a lot of problems with teachers that weren't very friendly. I did not see much beyond my high school, in part

because my parents themselves didn't know what opportunities the universities offered us. So I ended up going to barber school, and I graduated, became a barber and worked as a barber in Harlingen. My dream was to become a millionaire by the time I was 26 or 27. My idea was to buy barber shops and then oversee them while others made money for me. The problem is that I became a barber when men started styling their hair, and they started going to beauty shops. And so barbering because a very — it was not a very good profession at the time. So I had an opportunity to go to A & I, and I went to A & I. I started in January 1965 and graduated from A & I with a BA in'69, came back and got a Master's in '72. And once I did that, I was accepted in the doctoral program at UT Austin. And one of the most important things that happened to me while I was — there was a lot of things that happened to me at A & I that explained a lot of who I am. My intellectual development really began there. I mean, it began much earlier, but it really began in earnest. I began to more consciously seek to learn, to know, to understand, and to apply my understanding to my world. And it had a lot to do with the politics. The student movement was very encouraging. We encouraged each other to look for ways to develop skills to serve our communities. We were very idealistic, however, we were also serious about our commitment to serve our communities by becoming teachers or lawyers or whatever. And my first dream at A & I was to become a teacher. And then I dropped that and said I wanted to be an attorney. It's a long story. I'm making it very short, but I ended up deciding to pursue graduate work in history, in part because I believe that we needed to do more research and write more so that we could effectively teach Mexican-American history in schools, in the universities.

SMITH: How did you first become involved in the Mexican-American student movement?

ZAMORA: It just happened very naturally for all of us. The university wasn't very welcoming. Students were very rude and prone to using very racist language. The faculty was too. There

were some amazing faculty that encouraged us to get together and to talk about the problems we were confronting and our responsibility to our communities. I mean, we spoke in those terms. And I remember that we started meeting. And I remember one series of meetings that began in the spring of '67, about a year after I'd been there. And some people that ended up becoming major leaders like José Ángel Gutierrez, the founder of Raza Unida Party and Carlos Guerra, who became the Chair of the Mexican-American Youth Organization (MAYO) statewide. And also the campaign manager for gubernatorial candidate in the Raza Unida Party in '72 and '74 came out of there, Lupe Youngblood, the Chair of the Raza Unida Party in '72 was also associated with us. And we were very active and very successful as a student movement. We took over student government, and that encouraged us further. We also helped public school students, all the way from high school down to elementary, particularly in Kingsville and Robstown to walk out of the schools and protest the problems that they were facing. So we were involved in campus politics, but also reached out into our communities and the walk-outs. But we also supported the farm workers and did a whole lot of things with regards to farm workers and other causes. But our intellectual formation as young people in the '60s and the '70s was intimately tied to our political commitment to change. So what we were learning, how we were learning it was important because of the purposes we gave it. It wasn't simply a careerist, a commitment to build a career, but it was a commitment to change not only our communities, but the world. We were anti-war. We were pro-working class. We were pro-other minorities. We were pro-women's rights. We represented the student movement of the 1960's and '70s. One of the most important progressive elements in the liberal coalitions, the liberal urban-based coalitions began to emerge very importantly in the '60s and '70s in Texas.

SMITH: And were you taking any of those ideas back home?

ZAMORA: Yes. And that was a major challenge, because our parents — like all other parents — understood that this was a very risky business, to be very public with our identities and our dreams. They worried over our safety because it was very dangerous. And I remember my mom and dad telling me, "That's fine that you pursue your interests in that way, but you have to be careful, and we'd rather you not be involved." Things were going on back home too. Some high school students were threatening to walk out of school and so forth in him home town. Parishioners were raising questions in the church because the church was segregated. There were masses in the Catholic church for the English-speaking and masses for the Spanish-speaking. And there was one mass in which everybody came together, but Anglos sat on one side of the aisle and the Mexicans on the other. So people were raising questions about that, as well as the support of the Catholic church for the Farmworker's Movement in deep south Texas and for the rights of immigrants. So there was a lot of activity over there, a lot of stuff was brewing that involved the private conversations at home, public conversations at churches and at schools. But it was slow and the students that were in the movement, for the most part, were very impatient and were a little bit more bold and aggressive with the language and actions.

SMITH: And how did you find your way to Austin?

ZAMORA: I was going to go to law school. I got married. I almost got drafted. I was able to avoid the draft. That's another story. I got married, and we settled in Laredo, Texas, because I joined the Army reserves and had to wait to be called to boot camp before I could do anything. Nobody wanted to hire people that have signed up for the reserves or the National Guard but had not yet gone to boot camp, because employers didn't want to hire you and then see you leave at any moment. And that was very difficult, and my dream then was to go to law school. I had been accepted at the National Law Center at George Washington University with deferment and

a full financial package. However, at the last minute, they told me they couldn't get me a deferment and I had to give it up. And that's why I joined the Army reserves. And then I applied at St. Mary's University Law School, and they admitted me. And I applied for a scholarship from the Mexican-American Defense and Educational Fund, and they didn't give me a scholarship. They said they had lost my files. That really got me very angry, and I remember a conversation I had with a dear friend who I talked to living in California. And we would always talk. We talked once a week over the phone, and I told them about my disappointment. And he said, "Well, let's look at you. When we talk, what do we talk about?" I said, "We talk history." "When you read, what have you been reading?" "History." He said, "Well, maybe that should be telling you something," and that's how I decided to pursue a degree in history. I was already involved. In Laredo, where I lived, I got a job with the Community Action Program. The part of the War on Poverty Program that LBJ pushed for in Congress. The legislation created this anti-war, anti-poverty program, and within it were — in different localities, they named them different things. In Laredo, they call it a Community Action Program. And so I got this job and I remember the fellow telling me, "I don't know what you can do for us, but we have a mobile home out there, and we want people to talk history. That's one of the things people have talked about in our different community executive committees." So I went house-by-house and got artifacts — like photographs, cannon balls, anything — and built a museum inside the mobile home. And then I went to each one of the eight community centers and parked and just welcomed people in. I went and parked the thing at the elementary schools, middle schools, and the high schools and taught history that way. So that was part of the conversation I had with my friend who said, "Well, what do you do? You read this. We talk about this. What are you doing? Teaching history." So I applied, and I was fortunate to get admitted here. Not in history.

I got admitted into a multi-disciplinary program in Mexican-American Studies at the doctoral level set up by Américo Paredes. And so I was very fortunate that I was able to study history, but at an arm's length from the Department of History, which was very racist at the time and forced a lot of people out of the graduate program. And so I was in the History Department, but sufficiently removed so that they couldn't really do me much harm. So I was able to finish as a result of that.

SMITH: And what was the year? That must have been one of the first — very early on in that program.

ZAMORA: Well, I got here in '72, and so I was in the program really '73. And then I left in '75, after my — I had a divorce. It was in '75-'76 when I had the divorce that I ended up trying to get back on my feet. So I had a teaching job here as an AI. And I started teaching with Juarez-Lincoln, and I was teaching a course at UTSA with the bi-lingual/bicultural program. So I was working three places, running myself ragged, but that's how I got back on my feet. The dissertation, of course, I had to put it aside. So when I worked at Juarez-Lincoln, I was going through some really serious personal difficulties, which involved the divorce. The jobs required that I move all over the place. And in these constant attempts to get back on my dissertation, and I really didn't get back on it until I got a permanent job after I left Austin around '77-'78. Then I taught at UTSA for a year, and then I went back to A & I and taught there four years until 1981. In '81, I got a job at UCLA. I worked there until '85. And then I got a job at the University of Houston from '85 to 2000. And then I got here in 2000, here at UT Austin.

SMITH: And did you remain active in civic organizations in that time?

ZAMORA: All the time.

SMITH: What were some of those organizations?

ZAMORA: Well, when I was working on my Master's — and I went back to A&I, worked on my Master's — and I'd already had that experience of working with the student movement with all kinds of organizations and then a year in Laredo where I worked with the Community Action Program. I come back to A & I to work on my masters, and I started working with a program called the Puerta Abierta program. And I went around the whole area helping students fill out admissions and financial aid forms. And I got 1,000 students admitted with full financial aid in one year. During that time, I was also involved in politics, and the organization that I was most involved with was the Raza Unida Party. The Raza Unida Party really has its origins in 1970 in San Antonio. And then it had some success in rural towns in South Texas. And in '71 it became an official political party vying for a position in the general elections in the State of Texas. One of the challenges that we were facing then, there was continuing walk-outs as well, so I was involved with students in organizing walk-outs and doing teach-ins for them. But I was also involved in going house-by-house, getting signatures to get the party on the ballot the early part of — it may have been the latter part of '71, early part of '72. And there's two ways for a political party to get on the ballot. You either pay a filing fee or you get signatures. We decided to get the signatures. We didn't have the money to be throwing around, and anyway, we saw it as a good way to get people to learn or hear about the party, to force us to go and talk to people face-to-face and to train ourselves on how to speak about the party, how to build the party. So we had meetings on the signature campaign. We had meetings where we learned about precinct rules for running precincts, the meetings and running for precinct positions in the precinct at the county level, state level. It involved a lot of political education. And so when I left in '72, I came to Austin. The signature campaign was still going on. So I immediately joined the Raza Unida Party. Once we got the party on the ballot, then the big challenge was to get people to

agree to be candidates. We were fortunate to get Ramsey Muñiz who was living in Fort Worth at the time. And we had other people that decided to run for different offices. And in Austin we decided — Barrientos, by the way, Senator Gonzalo Barrientos was part of another cause in Austin that involved a lot of these little bit older than us folks who had come out of different organizations in East Austin and businesses. And they put Gonzalo Barrientos up to run for state representative at the same time — in '72 — that we were entering the electoral politics. In other words, there's a liberal tradition that involves Mexican-Americans that results in '72 in Austin with Gonzalo's decision to run for state representative. We decided that we were going to run four people for the state representative position, and that to draw attention we would each have — I was one of them — our campaign group and so forth. And at a certain point, we were all going to step down and announce our support for one of these people. His name was Armando Gutierrez. He was a professor in Government at the time. And that's what we did. So we supported him. Now, the Raza Unida Party is a story in itself, okay? So I'm not going to talk more about it, but I was part of the student union, part of the Raza Unida. And then late — I'll go forward a little bit more. The campaigns in which Raza Unida participated were '72, '76, and '78. They're very important historically. At the time, when conservative whites began to leave the Democratic Party in large numbers, in part because of the urban-based liberal coalition that involved minorities like Gonzalo Barrientos and us. There was a split within the liberal coalition, but the liberal coalition as a whole was coming in strong the Democratic Party, and it was opening up in part because of the challenge we were making, you see, and people like Gonzalo Barrientos benefitted. We were the Malcolm X's. They were the Martin Luther King's. They benefitted from the pressure from the left. But in '76, I became the Chair of the Raza Unida Party in Travis County. An interesting side note — just to give you a sense of the

participation of women — I was always with women. I always sided with women. I always sided for women's rights. And the women included Martha Cotera, Inez Hernandez, Marlena Martinez, a bunch of other people cared for me and respected me, and they approached me and they said, "We want you to run for Raza Unida Party Chair. We want you to understand that we will support you," — the women — "but we, the women, will have a say in what happens once you get elected. And the reason we want to do that is because we want to propose Austin or San Marcos as the next site for the state convention, and we want to be in control of the convention because we want to put forth certain positions regarding the war regarding women." And that's why I got elected. The women supported me, and I was like the figurehead, the male figurehead. And we then organized the convention, and women had a lot of things to say at that convention. And so my years — that's what was going on in my life around the time that Juarez-Lincoln then appeared in Austin. Juarez-Lincoln comes out of a meeting in La Lomita, which is a church property in South Texas, close to Mission, Texas. In '70 — or was it '69 — in '69-'70, I was in Laredo — remember, I said that? I was in Laredo, and I was involved with a number of organizations and newspapers. And somebody made a call for a meeting to talk about how we were going to move the movement. And the meeting was held at Mission, Texas at La Lomita. We had general assemblies, and we had breakout sessions. And one of the breakout sessions was on education and I was there. A whole bunch of people were there. There must have been like 50-75 people. And I remember Leonard Mestes was one of the major persons who spoke on the problems that we were facing. Leonard Mestes was from New Mexico, and he now is working in the arch bishop's office in Brownsville, Texas. He was a priest who left the priesthood for a while to become involved in the movement. A very bright guy, very seriously committed to change, and he said what was being said all over the country among Mexican-Americans, "We

need to infiltrate the institutions," — educational institutions in this case, "but we also have to set up our own alternative institutions, because once you get into the universities, you lose control. You have to abide by bureaucratic rules like the university. We need to have our own educational systems." And people in Colorado were saying the same thing, and California, we need to have our own institutions. African-Americans were fortunate to have their own schools in part because they didn't want them in the all white schools, but they got something. So the idea was proposed, "We need to set up colleges, Antioch universities already demonstrated an interest in sponsoring alternative universities for the community with the idea of training people to teach the youngsters, that was it. And the idea was that we could then expand to make it a full educational system. Two schools came out of there. You may know some of this history already, but it's worth repeating. One of them was Jacinto Treviño established in Mercedes, Texas named after a Mexican-American who had a shootout with the Texas Rangers and killed a couple of them. Well, that gives you a sense of the spirit behind this, and it was — Martha Cotera and Juan Cotera by the way went there. They're very important in the story of Juarez-Lincoln, in part because they were at the meeting, and the they left their work — she as a librarian; he as an architect — and went to work there. The school was very poor. It did have the support of Antioch. In other words, it was accredited, but it didn't have enough people to teach. The tuition was very high. Times were very hard. The area was economically depressed, and there was a lot of — it was a reaction against the minister in South Texas particularly. Anyway, at the same time that that's going on, another school is established in I think it was Ft. Worth or somewhere up there in Northern Texas. And Leonard Mestes went there with Evey Chapa who was one of these women in the Raza Unida Party, one of the major, major figures. She went over there, and there's other people that went over. And for some reason, they decided

to come to Austin. I don't know why, but they arrived in Austin I think — I'm not entirely sure, but they arrived I'd say 1969-70, '70 maybe. And so that became a hub, like an institution of our own that naturally drew people, people from the university, people from East Austin, activists like Brown Berets, professionals. I mean, it became a very important center. It's no accident that the idea of a community center should re-emerge there. People had been talking about this — primarily the artists working with LUChA — they had been talking about setting up their own institution in East Austin. And I think it was LUChA. I remember that one of my colleagues here, Inez Hernandez, who was also Raza Unida — she was teaching here. She was working very closely with the Concheros. I don't know if you know about the Conchero tradition. The Conchero tradition is a religious ritual in which indigenous people dance to God, to creation. So they set up that organization and they connected it — we're really closely connected to the source, the Conchero source in Mexico City. And I think that was a group that really gave life to this idea of a separate artist community. Brown Berets were connected, but it was LUChA. In other words, the Concheros became LUChA. Out of LUChA comes Conjunto Aztlan. A bunch of poets. The literary festival, Flor Y Canto, was hosted at Juarez-Lincoln and other places. So the artists were very, very important, and they're the ones who brought this idea of a community center into Juarez-Lincoln. And Juarez-Lincoln was like — was the community center. It was just inviting people to come in, run very strictly by Leonard Mestes because we had a very serious purpose, to teach. And so I got a job to teach. I was a member of the faculty. We had satellite campuses in Corpus, the Valley, Laredo, El Paso. But this was the mother campus, an old building I thought was a very beautiful building. We had space. We had a place, and it was a university sponsored by Antioch, accredited by the State. We were getting grants to produce materials on migrant education, for example. We were producing that. We had a library. We

had outreach. The classes basically involved one-on-one relationship. People would sign up for their Master's in Education for the most part, and they'd meet with you on a regular basis. You work up a plan. You give them credit for what they had learned in some work-related activities. That was part of it. It was called an Education Without Walls, where you acknowledge the learning that people had outside the classroom. So we worked up a plan, individual plans, and then assigned readings, assigned writings, had serious discussions, applied what they learned to the classroom, came back with reports. It was a really very progressive educational model. They borrowed a lot from Antioch people. They were very, very progressive. So my relationship with the MACC begins when the MACC was just in its early, early stages, where it was an idea of a community center primarily devoted to the arts because it was the artists who initiated it. But it was also — we never — one of the things that has bothered me about the way people see the MACC is that they see it in very strict artist terms. We saw everybody as being potentially an artist, if not an artist already. Art is life. It's how you see life and how do you interpret life, how you connect your life with the rest of the world. I think art — in the broad sense of the word — is what defined what the artists were doing. They were very open. Everybody was writing poetry at the time. I remember. Everybody would attend the teatro things. Everybody would attend all these artistic events. Everybody would go to them to get inspiration. The artists, a lot of times, weren't bound. It gave you ideas. It was really, truly, the artist really nourished that creative spirit. So the idea began as a very broadly defined artistic endeavor. In practical terms, it was called a center. We want a community center. That's where it comes from. Once I got a full-time job at UTSA, I left Juarez-Lincoln, and I left Austin. And then I pursued my career, and when I ended up in — I'd come back and visit, but when I came to Houston in 1981, I think Juarez-Lincoln was already winding down. And I don't know about the

idea of a center at the time. But the next time I really made a connection I think was in 1998. We were coming to Austin a lot, and we came to Austin and attended the La Pastorela production. And it was just so amazing. It was just so beautiful. I remember that it was at the old building. I don't know exactly where it was, but there was an old building, and basically the people sat around and the production was in the middle with one stage on one end, another stage on the other end, and the actors running back and forth. But it was a beautiful production. And then, of course, when we moved we attended installation ceremonies. But my close association with the MACC then occurred when we moved here and my daughter became very involved in La Pastorela. So that's how I'm connected to the Center. I even acted. Were you there?

SMITH: I remember that, yeah.

ZAMORA: They just pulled me in. My girl was in La Pastorela for about four to five years, and the last year, we were both in it together. Because I'm practically the one who raised my children. Angela's been so busy. But I always take her to practice, and this one last year that we were in it, Donato was supposed to play the part of the narrator and he quit three or four days before the production was supposed to go on. And so the director — what's her name? Anyway, she came up to me and says, "We want you to do it. You've been here every day. You've read the script and it's no big deal." I hadn't read it all. I didn't know what I was getting into. I said, "All right." Turned out to be a major undertaking. I had been on stage before when I was an undergraduate, but I mean, it had been so long ago. I love theater, so I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it in part because you do a lot of introspection when you're in theater. And at my age, I think I had to do that one more time in that way. But that's — my association with the MACC is really somewhat limited. The reason why I agreed to this interview is because I have something that is special, and that is I can look at this thing historically, as a participant in things that led to

the MACC. I was involved in things that led to the MACC, and I had very close personal political relationships with people that have been in it, like Martha Cotera.

SMITH: How do you feel that the climate in Austin changed from that time when you were working at Juarez-Lincoln until when you came back? And if you could refresh my memory on when you actually moved back to Austin.

ZAMORA: I left in I think '77-'78, and I returned in 2000. I mean, I kept coming back to visit and everything, but what was it like then and now? How is it different from the way it is now? Well, in many ways it's no different. You still have so many people that are so passionate about the Mexican-American community, and you find these people in various organizations. Then, as well as now, you find very important differences of opinion about the nature of the problems, what to do with them. There's a lot of frustration now — as there was then — because of the slow change and the challenges that you're always facing. But one of the big differences I think is that — and I think you see it in various realms — we now have large numbers of people in different positions. I mean, most of us that were involved were, for the most part, students, a couple of professionals here and there, but we weren't tied into resources. We didn't have resources. I mean, Antioch came down from heaven for us. It wasn't something that you expected to appear in the 1970's. I mean, these days you've got all kinds of organizations that may differ with you, but they're approachable. You can talk to people in the Hispanic Business Association. You can talk to people that are involved with the teacher's organizations or organized labor and with the non-profits. We didn't have that. I think we have many more resources, and a lot of the people that were involved then and came up through all these very difficult moments are in those positions. We didn't have but one or two faculty here in the centers. Now we have a little bit more. So that I think an institution like the MACC does have

resources, can draw on resources. There's great potential for the MACC that we didn't have for Juarez-Lincoln, for example, back then. With all the differences and all the cute personalities, I think it's much better now, absolutely.

SMITH: And can you talk about this relationship between cultural and political empowerment? This is something that I'm personally interested in.

ZAMORA: Cultural and political empowerment?

SMITH: Empowerment at the same time. Because you were active in a lot of political organizations, but I see that the artists become active too, and maybe if that was taking part in Austin.

ZAMORA: Well, you know, political empowerment is the subset of cultural empowerment. Cultural empowerment for me is broader and more profound because it goes from an individual doing what individuals do, going through this process of introspection all your life, trying to figure out who you are and then being open about who you are, where you're going and so forth. And so many things go into that, particularly relationships, relationships to politicize. So I see cultural empowerment that way is very basic and profound, operating at the individual level, and then at the public organized level. And I think the artists contributed significantly to the cultural empowerment because I think they were inspirational in that they were public. Those questions we ask ourselves privately or with very close friends, I mean, the movement is that in public. That's what it is. Look at what the women were saying. What were they saying? The personal was political? That was like a major issue. But the artists were inspirational in that they were asking those questions publicly, who are we, what responsibilities do we have to each other, and how do we meet those responsibilities in an ethical manner, in a caring way, and what kinds of dreams do we have and how do you make them happen without creating harm along the way?

All of that for me is cultural empowerment, where you're encouraged by others who are braver than you, who go public. Look, the people that do those skits, they're bearing their souls, man, it's a lot like getting on stage. To get up there and dress like an indigenous person and then do this ritual in front of people that have been raised Catholic. It's as foreign to people here as anything else, but they're trying to recapture the ancestral ties, and sometimes with nothing to help them. And I think it's very brave. So you, at the very least, extend some — give them your attention. And then once you get drawn in, you start thinking about things. So that's cultural empowerment for me, getting encouraged to express desires and wishes and so forth. The political empowerment comes when you start taking those relationships that have become very personal — public, political, personal relationships — and then tie them into specific projects. I've seen political projects fail, and I've seen them prosper. And I think the key is to build political relationships on the basis of personal relationships. And those personal relationships have to be healthy relationships where people respect each other and are somewhat like minded, respected, and so forth. I don't know if that makes sense. For me, it makes sense.

SMITH: That's great.

ZAMORA: The personal and the public.

SMITH: I just have seen in my research a lot of the same people are involved politically that helped get the MACC started. So I kept seeing this correlation of the same people being involved in both groups, so I think that's really interesting.

ZAMORA: I think one of the things that is important about a place like the MACC is that it's like a physical embodiment of the passion, the dreams, all this stuff that we say that we are and then gets kind of dramatized and embellished and it becomes something physical. But the physical has to have something attached to it, the meaning. So the MACC has all this meaning.

It's not just obviously a beautiful building. It has meaning, and the meaning comes from these memories of people going public and then organizing these political projects. The movements, these causes, they become causes because people get all self-righteous and moral and stuff. And so whatever they create, they then give it that symbolism. It's like a survivor of the wars. A good survivor, a good product result of the wars of the '70s and the '80s. I don't know if you've seen the little film that Gilbert —

SMITH: On Juarez-Lincoln? Yeah.

ZAMORA: I think that captures so much in a very odd way about the meaning you give to these things. I mean, it was so moving for me to see how a dream that takes the form of a physical building — that is associated with this building — faces this destruction. As the building is destroyed, the dream gets stronger. But the dream suffers too. So I don't know. I think that the MACC is what Juarez-Lincoln was. And the MACC, if the MACC was ever to be physically destroyed, it would also produce those kinds of very profound feelings that results from seeing that film. That's a wonderful film. I'm going to use in class this year. There's so much there. I mean, I've given it some thought. I'm sure I haven't captured everything, but I want to see what the students say. The idea of the ball hitting that angel with the extended arms in the face. I mean, she's just there stoically taking it. And then you hear these sounds. It sounds like La Llorona, the sounds from the legend of the woman who goes and kills her children because she doesn't want them to suffer or whatever. It's like — oh, it's horrible. It's like the spirit of La Llorona reminding us that, you know, earthly stuff can be destroyed. But just that figure.

SMITH: Beautiful.

ZAMORA: She didn't move. She was just like this.

SMITH: Yeah.

ZAMORA: How dare they? I mean, how? Jesus. If I had been a worker, I would have walked off. I wouldn't have been able to do that.

SMITH: I'd like to know the name of the construction company. I don't think that you can see that in the film, but it seems intentional, right, that that's where they start hitting her, in the forehead. I mean, it doesn't seem like they just picked a random place, but just…

ZAMORA: Did you start to say something about the name of the place?

SMITH: Yeah, I was just wondering, curious, who the construction or the wrecking company was.

ZAMORA: Yeah, it would be good to know. Yeah.

SMITH: So let's transition to your work with the MACC on the Advisory Board. How did you decide to become involved in that way, on the Board?

ZAMORA: Martha Cortera. We're very close to Marta Cortera, and we visit with her regularly. And she was always telling us about the discussions — arguments — and differences and projects and stuff. And then she decided to step down, and she asked me if I wanted to serve. And I agreed in part because she was asking me, but also because I was always — been fascinated by that place. I mean, next to Juarez-Lincoln, I don't think there's any other institution in Mexican-American history that is at the same level or even more important. I mean, it was Juarez-Lincoln and then there's the MACC. There's nothing like that in between, before, or after. Nothing. I mean, what? CMAS? So I was encouraged by Martha, and I wanted to make a connection between the University and the MACC and give it that kind of, you know, strength in programming and… And I just ended up real quickly liking the people I was working with, with some exceptions. [chuckles] But the folks involved in the MACC are wonderful

folks, just wonderful. Linda's doing a great job I think. The fellow that was there before was doing a great — I can't remember his name right now, I'm sorry.

SMITH: Simon.

ZAMORA: Simon.

SMITH: Orta.

ZAMORA: Simon is great. Simon was so giving. He was so giving. That's the reason why the place has been successful, because of the people that have contributed to it. So Martha, the opportunity to connect with the University, and then working with folks there really.

SMITH: And how did your point of view of the MACC change working on the Board, as a Board member, or did it?

ZAMORA: Well, I didn't realize how bureaucratic the process is. It's too bureaucratic. It's just keeping the MACC from developing further. That's one of my views. I don't think it ought to be operating within Parks. I think it ought to be independent. I think all community centers ought to have more freedom to encourage community people to get involved. I think the bureaucratic rules I think account for the distance. It's not that Herlinda doesn't want people to be involved or is not welcoming. It's just that, you know, you charge a fee. You have to. You have to have a schedule. That means you have to plan things. And if you don't show up on time, you can't get on. And if you don't have the money to rent the place, you can't use it. If the Board wants to raise money, they can't do it. And you have to constantly have to put out these little fires, you know, with misunderstandings with Parks people. Sometimes unnecessary fights. One of the things I've learned is that the MACC's major problem is the bureaucratic rules. It's the strength too, right, because it's become a very formal — and as it should be — I mean, you have to take care of these places. One of the problems in the social movements that I've been

involved with is that we were so democratic we allowed everyone and anyone with any ideas to come in and do as they pleased. And I think we needed a middle position. We all need to be open, but we can't be stupid either. We also need to have rules about how you come in and for what purpose. So I think the MACC ought to move away from bureaucratic rules a little bit. But to be careful, to maintain some rules, some order, because you can't — as what's his name, the famous debates between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, you know, Alexander Hamilton feared mobocracy, you know. If you really practice democracy, then you're going to have all the rabble, you know, coming in and taking over. I don't want to put it in those terms, but Jefferson was saying, but on the other hand, we have to trust democracy. So there's a middle road.

SMITH: There's a balance.

ZAMORA: Yeah, just strike a balance between, you know, mature, grown up understands and openness.

SMITH: And how do you see the MACC's role in the community here in Austin, and specifically in the art community?

ZAMORA: Well, I think it should be more open. And it means, in one way, separating itself from Parks. You know, the last program that they had with this woman artist who brought in these — wasn't it so amazing? It's extraordinary. If artists, you know, there's some great artists. If these great artists that are among us are given the opportunity to put things on the table and see them through. I mean, put them on the table meaning to discuss them, to share them, to get approval, to get help, and then to put them on stage. I mean, you can have some wonderful stuff. I think that program promoted all kinds of things - respect and support for the immigrant community, openness in terms of ideas and voice. Then there's also the great exhibit that was on

at the same time about the fellow on the Narcos. That's powerful stuff. So the MACC could become a major center of not only art but thought and culture. Now, I wish it would open up more to artisans. I wish it would be more open in defining what art is. I think it should be more inclusive. It can be much more inclusive, and I think this program — what's that artist's name, the woman?

SMITH: Margarita Cabrera.

ZAMORA: I mean, those kinds of things where you involve the community are just extraordinary. And I think the attendance was great. It can always be better, but once word gets out, people are going to be coming in in droves. But I do think history is not just a craft, it's an art as well. Teaching is not just —

SMITH: Exactly.

ZAMORA: It's an art. To understand and respect children, and then to know how to speak to them and know how to recognize the profound stuff that goes on learning. That's art. So I wish — and that's one of the things that I brought in in the first two meetings. I made that argument, and I got opposition very quickly. No. In effect, my perception — I'm dramatizing this a bit — basically was that there was some people were saying, "We want highbrow art." That basically was the response to me. And I used examples of artists like Valdez— who did the artwork in Juarez-Lincoln — and their response was, "No, we don't want that kind of artist." I got so angry, and I said, "Well, you're mistaken. Art involves all kinds of artists. Valdez and others that are involved, but it also involves — I think it has to have a broader definition." I said, "Historians can be artists." "No, they're not." "Yes, they are."

SMITH: What do you think have been some of the hardest challenges that the MACC has faced?

ZAMORA: Communications with the Parks. And the other challenge is, I think, that Board members I think may feel somewhat constrained by the rules, but also mostly because of the rules. I mean, the Board could do a lot more if you just let them go and give them more freedom. I think the other challenge obviously has been the lack of staff. I mean, practical terms, there hasn't been enough — I mean, we went — Juan, myself, and Sylvia, and I don't know who — we went and confronted the City Manager, and we confronted this other guy, Lumbreras, about four years ago and said, "Hey, we're running on low, guys. We only have two or three staff persons. We're supposed to have eight." And then they gave us two more. You know, if you overburden the staff, you're going to end up with a bigger problem. They're going to quit on you, or they're going to just — oh, who knows. But the staff has to be content. I mean, I think they're very devoted, and I think in part because they see the value of what they're doing is wonderful. But you need more people. That's the other challenge, I think. But the other big challenge is the connection with the community members. I'm not the kind of person that believes that the community is only in East Austin. The community is also the professionals. The community is also the teachers. The community is also all kinds of children. The community is broad and big. It is. It should be. Working class Mexican-American families too, but that's not the only part. So we should open up much more to all communities. Yes, especially Mexican-American people, but there's a lot more that could be done. But that's the other challenge, opening up, connecting more effectively. Because those perceptions are so horrible. You could be open — in other words, you have to do more than just open up. You also have to make sure the people understand that there's goodwill and so forth. I think the publicity has to involve some kind of public relations too. People need to understand, man. The Board is

subject to rules, under these bureaucratic rules. And they don't have the freedom to do everything they're supposed to do.

SMITH: What have been some of the most rewarding aspects of being involved with the MACC?

ZAMORA: The relationships that I have built with Juan, for example. Juan and I have become very good friends, and we're very open and frank with each other. I tell him — I tell him when he needs to tone things down. I do tell him. He doesn't listen to me all the time, but the relationship I have with him, I value a great deal because I think it's made us better servants, better members. I think a lot of the activities that have been sponsored by the MACC is just — I've enjoyed them. I just loved them. La Pastorela is such a great thing. The Mariachi production they did, and the different panels that we've had addressed a number of issues. I've enjoyed them. And, you know, I take pride in being involved in things. I've always done that. This fulfills me. It's been an honor to be associated with the MACC for what, three or four years? And I can say that I did something. I tried, you know. So I think the personal relationships that I've developed with people, and then I've enjoyed a lot of the programs. And then I feel pretty satisfied that I contributed something, made time to do something.

SMITH: And what is your vision, next five to ten years, what do you foresee?

ZAMORA: I think the MACC is going to be there in five or ten years. The question is what is it going to look like? I think there's going to be greater demand for public programming of an artistic nature, and I think the MACC is going to be expected to do more. And I just hope the resources are there. I hope we get out of this damn crisis. Once we get out of it, I think things will turn favorably for the MACC in terms of resources. And I hope — people are saying that they support the idea of taking the MACC out of Parks. I think if that happens, it'll be good.

More resources, the MACC staff and the Board have more freedom to do as they please, then I think it's going to be greater and better. I think that it, you know, it is an urban-based, regionally based center. But I think it should reach out and become, obtain some kind of national stature. I think that's one challenge that's going to — in other words, it ought to have a close working relationship with the Hispanic museums in Albuquerque and Los Angeles and Chicago and Linda should be visiting those places. And those organizations ought to have some kind of consortium so that they can help each other out co-sponsoring things that they can share, writing proposals. I think that's the way to go, too, that's the direction that I think is very promising. But I don't know, I don't have much faith that it'll happen, in part because people are so overwhelmed with what they have to do now. But once you take out Parks, add more resources, then I think that's a possibility. The other is to incorporate the immigrant community more, particularly the artisans, I think, in a broader definition of artwork. I think this place could become a national institution. I think it should seriously consider that, as soon as things get better. You know, we're going to have Mexic-Arte too, with a beautiful big building, I think, maybe. I don't know what the relationship is going to be like. I think that's another challenge. I think Mexic-Arte and the MACC need to be real clear about how they're going to cooperate. Because Sylvia is very effective. Sylvia should not be on the Board of the MACC. I think she's a very good builder, but her — you know, I have a lot of respect for her. I think she's done great things for the MACC — and this does not reflect on her — she ought to just focus on Mexic-Arte and make that grow and have a really good working relationship with the MACC. I think both could benefit a lot more. I think she needs to devote all her energy, especially now with the attempt to get it on the bond. I think it's gotten dicey. I don't know if you've heard, but

anyway… I think the relationship that it has with local institutions, but then the national ones is important.

SMITH: Great. Is there anything that you would like to add that we haven't covered already?

ZAMORA: No. Gloria Espitia is lways honoring other people, and she should — always honoring other people, and she should — all of this — she should be honored too. People should be reminded about all that she does and encourages others to do. I've always been saying that. I don't know if you remember the program where she was honoring all the trailblazers. I put her on one of my talks. She's a trailblazer too. I think she's made a bid difference. And this is the kind of stuff that can tie things together, so you get to know what everybody's doing. I hope that whatever comes out of this in terms of a public program speaks to that. You know, what is our relationship with Mexic-Arte, what is our relationship with the University and so forth, the schools. Given this is who we are, this is who we're becoming. So how we're going to fit into the larger picture. I think that's what people should be asked to talk about, what it's going to look like in five or ten years, as you asked. I think that's a very important question. I think that's a central question. So I would say that too. Don't you think?

SMITH: Yeah. I think it's very important, and I hope that people will use all of that passion that they have, that is so strong. That's why everyone was involved. Whether the passions were different, that passion exists and is there, and you can do a lot with that, but you have to work together.

(Interview ends)