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**Interviewee: Jimenez, Maria**

**Interview Date: February 25, 2012**

**University of Houston**  
**Oral History of Houston Project**  
***UH Memories***

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Place: Houston, Texas

Interviewer: Samantha Rodriguez

Transcriber: Michelle Kokes

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**Abstract:**

Maria Jimenez came to Houston from Mexico with her family in 1957. She recalls growing up in the Houston school system where she was not allowed to speak Spanish and faced repeated instances of discrimination by her classmates. Rather than bow down, she became actively involved in speech and debate at Milby High School where she won awards for debate and her oratory on the discrimination faced by Mexican Americans. She expanded her fight for social justice in the late 1960s and early 1970s while a student at the University of Houston.

Actively involved with the Young Democrats and then the Mexican America Youth Organization (MAYO), she was an advocate for farmworkers, feminism, gender quality, abortion/reproductive rights, and establishment of the Center for Mexican American Studies. She worked with other activist groups on campus such as the Afro-Americans for Blac Liberation (AABL) to achieve common goals.

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**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON**  
**ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT**

**Maria Jimenez**

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**Interviewed by:** Samantha Rodriguez  
**Date:** 02/25/2012  
**Transcribed by:** Michelle Kokes  
**Location:** Houston, Texas

SR: This is going to be for the U of H Memories project and you agreed to be a part of this project correct?

MJ: Right.

SR: Okay. What is your personal background? Where were you born and where did your parents come from?

MJ: My father is from Zaragoza, Coahuila, and my mother from Frontera, Coahuila. I was born in Castaños, Coahuila, so we are all from the state of Coahuila, which is the state that used to be part of Texas and so that's where we are originally from.

SR: What neighborhood did you grow up in when you were in Houston? What was it like to grow up as a Chicana in that neighborhood?

MJ: Well, we came to the United States in, well, my father in 1956, he first migrated to Chicago because that's where industrial workers would go. He was a machinist and so everybody went to Chicago to work in the steam plants there. He didn't like it so he had a former foreman from Mexico who worked in Houston and invited him to come to Houston, and so that's how we came to live in Houston. Of course he stayed in what is around De Zavala School. That's where he was housed, but he apparently told us that he wanted to choose a school where it was predominantly Anglo because they would speak English there and we would learn English.

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So when we arrived in 1957 we lived basically one or two blocks from Franklin Elementary School, which at the time was predominantly Anglo. So I started the first grade a few months after arriving in the United States, and we were not permitted to speak Spanish in school. We would be expelled if we did. I remember as a child being scared that I would be expelled because I spoke Spanish but also being confused because I couldn't even ask "where is the restroom?" or "I want some water" and I didn't know what was happening in the classes. I happened to have actually one of the very few Latino teachers, a young woman I remember, as my first grade teacher, and she would just look around so that nobody would see us and would explain to me some of the assignment and that's how I understood some of the basic assignments. But I remember even being in the playground and asking someone who was Spanish speaking a question and someone saying, "Oh we're going to go tell the principal that you are speaking Spanish." So that was one of the first and essential sort of meetings with predominantly Anglo society, which was this basically this denial of language. And there was also an attitude throughout the school and even among the predominantly Anglo classmates and teachers, and even ourselves, I think we began to believe it of being, actually considering the Mexican culture to be something bad. Because that was like for instance something as simple as eating lunch you know having come from Mexico we just weren't familiar with sandwiches and I wound up having to bring a sandwich because that's what everybody brought, but if you even tried to bring a taco or a tortilla people would ridicule you. Even Latinos would ridicule me but they were children, so there was this sort of condemnation to be Mexican or Mexican culture.

Next one of the things I remember I also remember interactions with stores and when we would go to a store, I mean, all the personnel spoke English and we could hardly find anybody who could speak Spanish at that point in time; and even the food wise, I remember there was

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only one brand of tortillas and it was pretty bad tortillas; and only one radio station where we could listen to in Spanish, so it was a pretty isolated experience for us.

Our next door neighbor they had been in the United States a couple of generations so they were more familiar with the ins and outs of the society and became very close friends with my parents so they helped us to sort of navigate through this particular system. But we still found it a sort of a, we were estranged in a sense from the society. I remember having as a child growing up that I would live in two different worlds. One that was Mexican and because my parents were very strict about not speaking English at home. They used an inflexible rule, you didn't speak English at home because they felt that was the only place we would learn Spanish. So the society outside of the home would teach us English but they were also very Mexican in their culture. We would visit relatives in Mexico at least three times a year, Christmas, summer, and sometimes when there was a wedding or funeral we would go back. So there was a very close relationship to Mexico as well. So it was that I remember well growing up.

In elementary school but also in middle schools particularly because a lot of my classmates the Anglos were leaving. They were going into the suburbs so the middle school while I was in the seventh grade, which at the time seventh grade was predominately Anglo, but by the time we graduated it was predominantly Latino. I remember that one of the issues was dating. Of course a lot of my Latina friends they were dating, but we were... I couldn't because the Mexican culture, you know, it was just we didn't, never dated you just simply were allowed to interact with the person who was supposed to be your husband. So it was a very different, you know, always living in sort of two different worlds, but also very conscious of this rejection of that which was Mexican. I remember classmates using, you know, expressions about "dirty

Mexicans" etc. I remember when we would go back to Mexico and come back on what is now I-

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10, which was basically U.S. 90 at the time, we would go through little towns like Schulenburg and Seguin, and we would... there were restaurants where we weren't allowed to eat there.

I remember that as a child. And also I remember once doing a, basically a school assignment, and we were supposed go to do it in teams and I did it with this one Anglo classmate (this must have been in fifth or sixth grade). We were going to do it at her house because she was the only one who had a typewriter, and so we went to her house on Sherman Street; that's where they lived. I can't remember exactly what block but we went to the house and as I sat there working with Sheryl was her name, or is her name, basically her grandmother tells her little brother, who is about to go outside, she said, "Don't play with the fool Mexican boys." And right after I finished the assignment I said, "Sheryl why did your grandmother say that? I'm Mexican and I was inside your house." Sheryl says, "Well, I told her you were French." So basically that type of thing and then in the seventh grade I remember one of my classmates who had gone to elementary school with me, Cynthia, she's about to move to La Grange, and she says, "No I'm going to move because I'm tired of being here with Mexicans. You know why Mexican's dance the Mexican hat dances?" I said, "No, why?" She says, "That's because they are stepping over all the lice they have on them." So it was that type of sort of rejections that we would hear in the society that obviously excluded us. They thought our culture was bad and so by that time there was one or two teachers who were Latino also in middle school that helped us to sort of see things a little different.

As I said by the time we finished Edison, which was finishing the ninth grade because that's the way it was then, we were majority Latino. But then when we split the class split, some went to Austin some went to San Jacinto High School, which no longer exists that's where HCC downtown is now, and Milby. We were no more than 50% of the student body at Milby and

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again we were very segregated in the sense that, you know, we were...the young men were mostly in ROTC. The regular were sort of clubs and school activities were really closed to us, and I happened to go into debate. I was probably the only one, once in a while there would be another Latino but it was predominantly Anglo activity. I remember in debate or in speech you give your speech. You are in a contest so you have judges and sometimes one judge, sometimes three judges, or five judges depending, and I remember having lost a contest because the person...the judges wrote their reasons. One specifically said, "How can we let that Mexican girl win?" I mean there was actual moments where this rejection was definitely there. It was discrimination.

And then the other issue was that I was a legal permanent resident. So at one point in high school I entered a contest, I think, we did a mock government in Austin, I think they still do that from high schools. People get chosen to go to this mock government in Austin. I got chosen, but at the end they didn't let me go because I wasn't a citizen of the United States. It was only for U.S. citizens. So my debate coach who was kind of a very contradictory person, had grown up in the KKK family in Pasadena and belonged to the Masonic Lodge, but he supported us in opening up spaces. As a matter of fact he was responsible for the first integrated speech tournament in high schools where African Americans were invited to participate because they had their own tournaments. But he basically thought this was unfair so he went to a congressman and convinced him to introduce what is called a private bill and to try to make me a citizen of the United States; but, you know, like all bills in Congress, they take forever. So I became eighteen and so I immediately applied and became a citizen of the United States. But ultimately even though I graduated from Milby, we were ten tied at number one, I still didn't get any scholarships because ultimately there was discrimination.

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But it was during this period also that I learned a little bit about social struggle because I was active in the Catholic Youth Organization in Immaculate Heart of Mary and I must have been fifteen or sixteen years old when the Rio Grande Strike took place, and the priest we had there and another minister got together and decided that we should all work to contribute donations and food to the strikers and I remember that...

SR: Who were the strikers?

MJ: They were farm workers in Rio Grande City, and it was a very important strike. Then I remember in the neighborhood, like Mario Gallegos Sr. and David Ortiz and several others organized a bus that went down to help them. I didn't go because I was fairly young and, you know, wasn't permitted to go to those things. But I remember that they went, and I remember that there was a march from Rio Grande all the way to Austin and actually people mobilized from all over the state. I think about 10,000 people greeted them. So this was like my first real experience with the social justice issue but as time went on and the experiences I was having, by the time I graduated from Milby a lot of my speeches, (especially one called oratory that dealt with, focused on a problem), my oratory was about discrimination of Mexican Americans, and again it was a speech that when I gave it either I lost or won. Because it depended on the judge's prejudices.

So but I was already conscience that that was an issue but it was because you couldn't not be conscious. We were all experiencing it. Hidalgo Park for instance the Mexican park. As a child that was the only park we could play in. Parks were segregated. We couldn't play in any other park in the city except I remember we could go to the pool at Mason Park on the day they cleaned it. I think we were allowed to do that. But we couldn't play in Mason Park. So we experienced all sorts of and confronted all kinds of discrimination and segregation throughout as

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I was growing up here in Houston continually. So that helped shape sort of the idea that we had to struggle.

But I also, many times I confronted discrimination because I was a female. So there was also experiences of gender, like I remember my father was very fixed that we should all go to the university. He was also like, just like we couldn't speak English at the home, he instructed my mother that our work was just to study because anything that meant studying or any resources to advance our studies were primary. So we had it in our eye mind that we never doubted that we would go to college and get a degree because he just was very inflexible about that. He said that was what we all were supposed to do. That was our job as children. I do remember his friends saying, "Why educate the girls? They are going to get married." Of course my father would say, "No, if they marry poorly they can have the option of leaving" rather than say it was for our own....But he had his reasons and he sustained his position. But I do remember that and I remember that I couldn't go everywhere and even as I was getting scholarships and winning debates because my partner and I were debate champions of the state of Texas, we were being offered scholarships like to the University of Texas and elsewhere. My father would not permit it because I just could not go because I was female and so there was this sort of awful confrontation about being female.

SR: So why did you join MAYO [the Mexican American Youth Organization]?

MJ: Well when I got to the University of Houston the first thing I did was try to find a political option since I had already been thinking about it, and as I said in my oratory speech was primarily the problems of the Mexican Americans. I joined in the beginning I joined the Young Democrats because there was no MAYO. It was LOMAS [the League of Mexican American

Students] and I thought it was just more of a social organization as opposed to a political

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organization, so I joined the Young Democrats. There I guess I met some of the people that I would later work with in MAYO and Raza Unida, Daniel Bustamante and Arturo Estes. But the value for me there was that it was in the Young Democrats that you know Bill Chandler and the United Farm Workers came in to organize to grape, the lettuce boycott and it was through those contacts that I became part of the first committee that worked directly with Cesar Chavez in organizing the boycott here in Houston. So I liked that because, again, because of the oratory I had written I knew that Cesar Chavez was an important movement and so that brought us directly into attempting to do work around that particular issue. But I was dissatisfied because I felt that with the Young Democrats it was mostly electoral politics. Again they were focusing on general issues and not necessarily issues of the Mexican American so somewhere along the way the leadership of LOMAS, which was Tatcho Mindiola, Ramon Villa Gomez, and Lupe Rangel and some of the other people there, they basically announced that the LOMAS would become the Mexican American Youth Organization. Again because in my own oratory had talked about and spoken about you know Reies Lopez Tijerina and some of the others sort of movement events that were happening around the country. I knew that MAYO was what I wanted to be a part of. I wanted to be part of this movement and so I left the Young Democrats and went to MAYO.

SR: What was MAYO's mission or motto based on? Did the Black Power movement and/or the New Left influence its goals or tactics?

MJ: It was, we were angry young people and it fit the times in the sense of being introspective. It was, you know, a nationalist movement that tried to basically recover that which had been denied like our cultural pride and our language and a look back through our history and so forth, and I think that was it was very much parallel to the Pan-African movement. We were moving toward a Pan-Latino movement. It was composed of many, many different ideas but I

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think essentially it was a nationalist movement and cultural renaissance and pride. Our tactics were the tactics of the times. They were mostly direct confrontation. I remember one of the first things we ever did was go, you know, the leadership, again and I refer to Villa Gomez and to Mindiola, and to Jaime de la Isla they took us to support barrio MAYO who had seized a church in the barrio and helped them with that particular event.

I often say that the first time I ever actually went on a protest, a demonstration, it was organized by the leadership at the university and we demonstrated at Guadalupe church against George Bush, Sr. who had come to give a talk. He was a congressman at the time and I remember that we were going to go protest him. The interesting thing was there was nobody, there were about four people at that meeting listening to George Bush and we were about eleven so we overwhelmed the meeting. But it was my first experience so it was more confrontational politics as opposed to the politics of the electoral. We were talking about a vision, a vision of self-determination, and we could identify with those movements in Latin America. It depended, MAYO gave me the opportunity to meet people from other parts of the country. There was a national meeting there at the U of H, I remember, and so we got to meet people from California and New Mexico and other parts of the state that all had very much the same type of vision and politics. In that sense we were sort of parallel to these other movements like the Pan-African movements in the African American community.

SR: Any particular organizations that you all worked with or knew of in Houston?

MJ: Well we worked closely, because we were students I remember we worked very closely with the Black Student Union. Then later when we organized La Raza Unida Party we worked with a group that was the west part of the Pan-African movement who is now at SHAPE

Community Center, people around SHAPE Community Center. So we did work with them. Then

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we, I remember working very early when I was barley had joined MAYO, but knew Chicano existed, they asked me to write an editorial, and I wrote one on the rights of women. I got criticized by my own Chicano militants and some of the women as well, but I always defended it as the fight for the equality of women is the fight of the people of Mexico. Because I had gone to Mexico a lot and my maternal grandfather was a teacher I was already exposed to the history of Mexican women and the revolution and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and all this. So when they would question me about being a feminist and supporting the gringos who destroyed the culture, which is what they accused me of, I always told them, I rattled off Sor Juana Inés and all the other women who fought for women's rights in Mexico, so that's my history; I don't know what history you have but that's my history. So they couldn't move me from that. But it was also, I also remember doing work with Anglo feminist groups on campus.

Now that there's a lot of debate about abortion I remember being asked once to be a judge, and we condemned abortion laws because they were not, you know, it was illegal for women. A lot of women died during that period, and one of my complaints about the current movement and I said, "I think we looked at it more as the issue of reproductive rights and equality of access to services." Because very wealthy women in the United States went off to Europe to have abortions and so it was the poor women and, you know, who were dying because they would do all sorts of things. It wasn't about whether we believed life existed or not, it was about the people who needed those could treat it as a health problem so we should have access and not lose their lives. Because we never knew what circumstances you would be under. So it was about reproductive rights and access to health services.

SR: What was it like working with those white feminists on campus?

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MJ: Well they were always much more radical than we could be and it was like press, we did not lose a beat in terms of we were inserted within an oppressed community so we had to fight with all the community as opposed to just women. At that period it was very much a viewed us the particular feminist circles. When you have movements that are growing sometimes you are more anti- and part of it was, I remember, they would hold things like self-examination. They would have these rooms where you would, I don't know, you would do your own, everybody would do their own check-up of their vagina and things like this, which for us was too radical. The Latino culture we were supposed to be modest and all that. That was kind of difficult to break but that was I remember that.

Then the other issue was just the issue of that we felt it was like it was a struggle but it was a struggle within the struggle with the general community. It was also needed to give and the fight that we had to have in terms of equality and justice and so it was never, we never separated in that sense. But there were many stimulating conversations with the white feminists, and I knew many of them and we fought to get the women's history. I think I was one of her students of the women's history at the U of H because we felt it was important, but we never thought it was the primary fight. I remember the national women's something like, you know, convention that took place in Houston and going to one or two events and again it was sort of a clash between the Latinas who wanted to be a part strictly of the feminist movement and those of us who wanted to be part of the Chicano movement and fight for women's rights but within the context of also fighting for the rights of all members of the community.

SR: Were there many of y'all that were wanting to do both?

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MJ: There were some. I mean eventually there were, you know, we had our own organization of Raza Unida. The organization of even on campus and within Raza Unida but it took a while I think for that to develop, several years for that to develop.

SR: What were the specific goals of U of H MAYO on campus?

MJ: We wanted more access, more faculty, we wanted, you know, a different standards of admissions to take into account the inequities of the school systems, and so therefore we were what we were doing was increasing the number of students. Then we wanted to support for cultural programs that we thought were important for ourselves but also for the general public. So I remember a lot of taking over the president's office at the time and the vice president's office at that time that dealt with the issue of Latino faculty, that dealt with the issue of how we established the committee to analyze admission standards, and also the issue of Chicano studies. So we had a lot of willing administration per se dealt with that. When I was student body president one of the ones we also gained was making sure the administration complied with equity in scholarships. So...

SR: How did you feel about being a minority student on campus at that time?

MJ: It was really isolating because there were 29,000 students. There were no other campuses. In fact the central campus was the only campus. So 29,000 students were concentrated there, and we were about 400. It was... I remember my first semester I almost dropped out, I felt so isolated. But what helped was you know belonging to different groups and eventually when MAYO was created our little section in the Cougar Den, the Chicano section in the Cougar Den where we could, all of us at all hours of the day as long as the Cougar Den was open we could see each other. It was graduate students and law students and undergraduates in all sorts of disciplines because we were so few it was a way we could meet and help each other in that sense.

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SR: Is this the place where the mural is located?

MJ: Yeah eventually the... you know, when we, because we made alliances with some of the students who realized that the student association had funds. So we wanted some of the funds primarily to for student projects outside of the university, but we also for the university itself. We eventually got some funds from the students' association as well as some funds from MAYO and decided to do the mural. Apparently at one point it was going to be in another place, but we thought it was, you know, we thought it was alright there because that's where we were. That was our hang-out so it kind of would be there for future generations to know that this was, when we were very few, that's where we were and of course our identity, where we cooked up the social movement to decide what are we going to do next on campus and outside of campus because we were also all active outside of the community.

SR: How did the fight for CMAS begin and how was this fight connected to the national campaign for Chicano studies and this larger Chicano movement?

MJ: Well I just think the idea of this cultural renaissance and it again establishing an identity which was denied to us as children and as young adults and adolescents was very much a part of our experience so we wanted to make sure that we had a formal, you know, rescuing or recovery of our history and of our identity. Of course all over the country there were movements for black studies, women studies, and Chicano studies so we were a part of those movements. I can't remember how it got started, but I do remember my experience there was the questioning a lot of meetings questioning the administration about Chicano faculty as well as, you know, as well as the need to have a formal Chicano studies program. I do remember that one summer you know several of us got together and we wrote a proposal and we went to the state legislature. It just

happened that the liberal Democrats had beaten the conservative Democrats, and there were a lot

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of young progressive people within the Democratic party. We happened to walk in with our proposal and they wanted something to reinforce their power as a newly elected progressive element so they made the Chicano Studies Program or the Mexican American Studies Program at U of H a line item within the state budget. Now when I think back, I said it would have been very hard we just happened to walk into a situation.

SR: In what ways did the fight for U of H African American Studies impact the U of H movement for Mexican American Studies? And did you all work with AABL [Afro-Americans for Black Liberation] at all?

MJ: Yes, we worked with some of the members of AABL, I think that we had a working relationship. I mean there was...but they were further ahead in terms of the Black Studies Program. So we kind of just defended each other's space. I mean it wasn't...and we also negotiated, you know, particularly with the students' funds that created the ethnic studies department within the student association to continue working on speakers and so forth. So the Black Student Union would say, "We need funds to bring in Stokely Carmichael." We'd say, "Well we need funds to bring in Cesar Chavez." So we would negotiate to make sure that our programs were, we backed each other's programs. I remember that clearly. There was a good working relationship.

SR: What role did you play in the fight for CMAS? What all did you do?

MJ: As I said I remember that we got that line item. That's what I remember, and I remember we kept fighting for trying to get faculty to teach the classes and then recruiting people once the first few courses were open recruiting people to take them because you know we had... what if nobody took the courses. I remember that as well.

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SR: Why did y'all need to recruit people if there was already a movement for CMAS [Center for Mexican American Studies]?

MJ: Well there was a movement for CMAS, but again everybody was specialized. We were so few that some had already completed their electives or they were graduate students and this was an undergraduate program. So we just wanted to make sure that the minimum took them. So that's why we... I remember we made sure that people would enroll.

SR: Can you discuss any of the challenges that MAYO faced in pushing for CMAS?

MJ: Well I think a lot of it dealt with again a predominantly white institution that was U of H at the time led by very traditional academics so they just didn't think it was a valid area of study and that was, I think, the primary issue. Then there was a lot of maneuvering by the administration. I remember, "Where are the Latino faculty?" They would rattle off, "Oh, we have fourteen," and then you'd examine it, and its people who were married to Latinos or people who were from France and they decided to classify them as Latinos and things like this. There was an awful lot of maneuvering by the administration to squelch any criticism from us. Because we did, we... I remember taking over the president's office, and I remember so we... They knew we would do things of this nature so they would... they were a little... And actually I have the experience of having the vice president of academics, Dr. Fields, when we caught them red-handed using a fund that the state legislature had appropriated for minority students scholarships. They were using it to enhance their graduate programs giving them only to graduate students whether they were minority or not. So we caught them red-handed and you got the... you know, those state legislature to call them up and admit it and made a public issue so forth. He told me, he said, "Okay I'm afraid of you what do you want?" So we did have an

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impact on them. So it got to a point where we were getting more concessions then at the beginning where it was just a hard fight.

SR: Were you one of the few women who were involved in those efforts or were there other women involved?

MJ: Oh there were many other women we had a lot of. ... If you had made it in as a student into U of H many, many women were also there participating in the activities. Some of them like Josefina Rendon who is a judge now was part of the group. Celia Garcia was part of the group. We had Cynthia Perez whose family had a very important restaurant in Austin but now has La Peña.. There are women like Inez Tovar, at the time Inez Hernandez, who was a professor at UCLA Santa Cruz was also renowned poet and so many, many there were many women who were part of this, this effort.

SR: Describe the SOS program and how did it affect La Raza students?

MJ: Well the SOS was one of the programs that we tried to get in, it's sort of an extension of the Head Start program, that type of program where it was like federal funds in order to support students mostly with reading, writing, and math so that people wouldn't drop out and actually succeed. I remember that was one of the programs we fought for the university accepting and allowing students who, after we were able to get people on the admissions committee and get special considerations for people on the admissions committee, to support them in those areas so they wouldn't drop out. But I wasn't too much involved except for getting it done I wasn't too involved in the mechanics of it. I mean getting it through, making sure that people..., selecting the director, and that was about my experience with it.

SR: What faculty members were involved in the fight for CMAS? Do you remember faculty members such as Julius Rivera, Edward Gonzales, Guadalupe Quintanilla?

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MJ: I remember Rivera and I remember, yeah, and he was very good, he was very strong advocate.

SR: Who was Julius Rivera?

MJ: He was a sociology professor that I remember, I may be wrong, but I believe he was a sociology professor and Guadalupe Quintanilla because we didn't have that many people with doctorates. They basically took on... Rivera I think was fighting for it. I don't think he was around when it was finally established but Quintanilla was.

SR: And what was the relationship between MAYO and these faculty members? The faculty members had the Mexican American Studies Program Committee.

MJ: Uh huh [in the affirmative]. I wasn't too familiar with that because I wasn't as... you know, I think the graduate students had more of a role in the relationship. I do remember that Dr. Rivera was always considered with a great deal of respect. Everybody liked him and with Lupe Quintanilla it was different. There was, I don't know if it was partially because she was more, she had more of a tendency of rejecting the Chicano movement somewhat, not being... not embracing... she would embrace her Mexicanness but not necessarily the Chicano movement so I think... Whereas Dr. Rivera was more of in a transition, but he accepted or supported the transition for the Chicano movement.

SR: Why did MAYO find her to be a good candidate as the first CMAS president?

MJ: Who?

SR: Lupe Quintanilla.

MJ: Because there was nobody else. And there was debate. It wasn't necessarily, I remember it wasn't necessarily people were comfortable with it but there was no one else because she

did... people felt like she did speak and she spoke about her Mexican American roots but was

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not a pro-Chicano advocate. I think people were... some of us were uncomfortable with her, but at the same time she was the only one there who would do it. That's how I remember it.

SR: What type of Chicano classes were being envisioned at this time?

MJ: I think mostly it was history and politics. I know we could talk about the barrio, a course about the barrio but I think it was mostly history and cultural. I don't know, at the time, I don't even know about art, maybe I think some of the students were talking about art. But I definitely know history, politics and political science, and sociology.

SR: Was the Chicana-focused curriculum and/or Chicana studies being discussed at this time either locally or nationally?

MJ: I can't remember. I can't remember the discussion. Probably because by this time we were, we had our own group there on campus. But I don't remember it as a separate discussion.

SR: What do you mean by your own group? What group was that?

MJ: There was a Mujeres Unida on campus already.

SR: Who was Mujeres Unida?

MJ: I mean because unlike when I started when I wrote that first editorial and I was nineteen years old or twenty years old, by the time I left the university twenty-two, twenty-three, and twenty-four, the whole movement had grown and the women's issue had grown. So there were meetings of different types around the state and nationally that dealt with women's equality. I think of campus, we did do it and we did have a Mujeres Unida (48.24) it was again all the women who were active in MAYO. But I don't remember a specific... we must have but I have such a bad memory.

SR: In what ways did your feminism inform your political activism in the fight for CMAS and broader campus issues?

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MJ: Well I think it was my involvement really was the lettuce boycott that always gave me...and the fact that I was a Mexican immigrant as opposed to many of my colleagues who were second or third generation Mexican Americans. I had a very distinct identity and also the farmworker fight was like a broader fight because with the farmworkers you dealt with economic inequality, and you dealt with union organizing, and how the capitalist system worked in terms of, you know, the struggle of the farm workers against the agribusinesses and the agribusinesses were connected to government. So that experience I think helped me always to have a broader perspective of the Chicano movement as sort of a step toward equality but not necessarily the end in itself. So the women's movement was in the same way. That's why it was easy for me to see the fight for equality as a broader equality not just a nationalist. So a lot of people saw it as a nationalist experience. It was just for Chicanos and/or just for African Americans or just for women. But because of this broader experience that I had, particularly with the farm workers, I saw more as a strategy as opposed to a goal. I mean, I don't know if I can explain it. You fought for, because I was Chicana, I was Mexican and Chicana, I fought for that first. I mean I had to fight for that because that was my community. But I'm also a woman so I had to fight for that. So I, it didn't bother me doing that. For some women it was a big struggle for the woman's issue. But also the whole issue of income inequality would fit with poor whites and blacks. I didn't have much a problem with that. But then there were lots of people who did. They thought the only sort of resource issue was within the barrio and not to the broader struggles. But I think eventually conditions made us, like the fight against the war in Vietnam. We had our own organizations that organized and actually the largest I think the largest demonstration here during that period was the anti-war demonstration.

SR: The moratorium?

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MJ: Yeah the moratorium because there was a moratorium committee here. So not just in L.A., that's the one we know about, but there was one here.

SR: How did you become the student body president?

MJ: Well that was kind of a long story but basically because we worked with women's organizations, we worked with African American organizations, I think there was already some members of the first MAYO who were part of the student senate, and so there was an understanding of how we could use these resources for community organizing and as well as for the campus organizing. I sort of achieved...I was asked by one of the original members of MAYO and LOMAS who was a student senator if I would...I don't know how but they asked me to be on the student court, which at the time was traffic court, which dealt with traffic the parking lot issues. So I said okay. Normally they just nominated law students and they were predominantly white law students. So I was nominated and I got it. Eventually a lot of these law students were graduating and so I became supreme court justice, you might say the chief court justice of the traffic court. So during that period when I was chief justice we had this big fight because there weren't enough parking spots and so when students would park in the faculty, they would be ticketed. But when the faculty couldn't find a parking spot and parked in the student parking lots, they would not be ticketed. So we decided that this was unequal protection under the law; we decided to throw all the tickets out. So we found all tickets, we threw all the tickets, the student tickets out until this was changed by the administration and the people with security. So that was a big notoriety everybody, a lot of the faculty hated me because I had took... so that kind of gave me notoriety was the traffic court so people... There was a void and there was a void in white candidates who usually ran for president or vice president that year. So given that void

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over the student associations so some of the white progressives came over and said, "Hey in order to win we've got to build this coalition and do you want to run as vice president?" So this was a time like when we were asserting our rights so everybody said, "How can you run with a white guy and a male?" and stuff like this. So there were back room deals made that we would run and then in six months he would resign. It was funny because I had to go to the feminists and make sure they were alright with it. I had to go to the Black Student Union and make sure they were alright with it and the Latinos and so that's how come we ran. I ran with Steve Umoff who was the president. But once we were in he didn't want to resign, but there was some kind of scandal that happened and so he had to resign so that's how I became president. But originally we thought it was a political deal but we probably couldn't have pulled it off if he hadn't gotten in trouble. But once he was there, he didn't want to leave. And so we were learning how those political deals were made. Basically we just wanted access to resources and we had already figured out that we could develop this Department of Ethnic Affairs and fight for a budget there. Therefore, the Black Student Unions had a tutoring program in Third Ward, and we had a food co-op in Northside and so we just wanted access to the funds for speakers, for activities, cultural activities on campus but also for activities in the community.

SR: I was also on the ballot was free health clinic dealing with women's reproductive issues. Was that from the feminist movement or was that something also that you fought for personally?

MJ: We fought for them as an integrated, you know, as an integrated...because in order for the coalition to work everybody...and since I overlapped all of these movements that was the most acceptable to all these movements because I was able to represent all of the demands. So that was the women's movements, some of the women's demands...

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But I think during the year that we were finally there, one of the things that we did do, and I think we should look it up because I had forgotten the details, but one of the things we did do was we funded the first national gay conference. Nobody wanted to even lend them a place to have it. Nobody wanted to lend them any money at all. And I remember it was the student association that was dominated by the progressive elements that said, "This is something that we do that nobody else can do." So I remember we helped them get the place at the University Center for their conference but also gave them \$1,000, which that was a lot of money back then for their conference and so we also did that. Because I think we all, because of the type of movements the civil rights movements and so forth that were happening at the time, I think we were all conscious that maybe we didn't articulate as civil rights issues but they were all social justice issues.

SR: What did you think about other women of color fighting for equality and did you work with other women of color at this time?

MJ: All being I think we worked with other women of color. Well we did the Latino movement as people started to become more conscious of women's issues we did. With African American women, I think, it was just those that were active in the Black Student Union. I don't think we like did anything special and more understood it like the same fight. But there were some women who didn't agree; there were some women who didn't agree so it wasn't like smooth sailing.

SR: The women who didn't agree, why didn't they agree and what grievances did they have?

MJ: Well basically, I think, the concept was because it was a cultural renaissance, the Chicano movement it was like you had this ideal of the family and this ideal of la mujer and so it was

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associated feminism, associated with a gringo thing and breaking of family concept, of the cultural values of the family. I think that's what it was or how it was expressed.

SR: And then this as you stated this changed over time?

MJ: Yeah.

SR: Why do you think that changed over time?

MJ: Well because I think that's how consciousness developed. Sometimes just like when we were growing up and we had this dominant oppressive culture that denied our history and you know the teachers told me my last name was Jimenez [pronounced with a hard "J"] rather than Jimenez [rather than the hard "J," pronounced with an "H" sound]. I would say it was Jimenez [with the hard "J"] because I didn't have the consciousness that I needed to fight for my own rights. So as people become more aware and your conscious grows as to how your place and your identity is, so does your concept of which rights need to be expanded and fought for, and I think that's what happens.

SR: What did you think about the *huelga* school movement that emerged in response to HISD's so called integration plan? And what role did U of H MAYO play in this *huelga* movement?

MJ: Well I think we were ambivalent about the *huelga* movement. Some people became teachers; I never did. I was always ambivalent about it because I think the leadership was saying this was an injustice but I think the community was saying, "I don't want to go with those black people." And so that's what always there was a lot of that within the community. So it wasn't like clearly...it wasn't a clear movement of fighting for equality. The leadership may have been different in its conception but the grassroots had a different. There was a lot of racism. So I think

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we had ambivalent roles. Individually I think a lot of the Houston MAYO get those teachers out of the schools.

SR: And did the... was the huelga school movement and CMAS connected in terms of leader faculty members or those who support CMAS?

MJ: I don't remember that being there. Because I think that the leadership of the huelga schools was entirely based in the neighborhoods. I mean if you looked at the leadership they were neighborhood leaders or political leaders or even religious leaders who were leading it.

And again for the leadership, the question was one of fighting the bad plan of integration but the reason I think of the community response was there was a lot of racism.

SR: Alright did you have anything else that you wanted to say about CMAS?

MJ: Well the only thing I think it has become an important program because it has opened up, you know, a lot of opportunities for a lot of Latinos. Also my experience is when I've done like the Latino organizing class or that I sometimes give as a visiting lecturer, the comment from the student is they would have not known a lot of the history of the Chicano movement or understood the community in many ways if it hadn't been for CMAS and the classes that CMAS gives. So I think it has... if the Chicano movement disappeared, the CMAS sustained the goals that originally as a student movement we were seeking from the university, which was facilitating entry into the university and support mechanism for support of students. There's no Cougar Den but there's CMAS where students can come together and get together. Then the other thing is the issue of just simply increasing the faculty members and the courses and exposing the student body to, and particularly Latino students, to their own history and identity and that's very important.

SR: Thank you.

End of interview

