

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH HORACIO LOPEZ**

An Oral History Conducted by Laurents Bañuelos-Benitez

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Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada  
Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
University Libraries  
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2018

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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada*.

Claytee D. White  
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## PREFACE



Horacio Lopez was born on January 12, 1938, in Cordova, New Mexico to Elias and Cordelia Lopez. Lopez describes his hometown as self-sufficient and self-reliant and that his family grew their own food and raised livestock. His father only received a second-grade education and worked as a miner.

Lopez's high school days were filled with athletics and pursuing the school's cheerleaders. Upon graduation, Lopez decided that he wanted to enlist in the United States Navy, only to discover that his father had different plans for him. Accompanied by his father, Lopez traveled to New Mexico Highlands University to register for classes. Lopez would go on to attend the University of New Mexico and eventually realized his dream to serve in the military when he volunteered for the draft.

After leaving the military, Lopez arrived in Las Vegas in 1963 and went to work at the Nevada Testing Site. His brother Jimmy Lopez was a janitor at the test facility at the same time.

Lopez also stepped into roles with organizations that often advocated for disadvantaged individuals. He played a vital role in establishing organizations that help Latino business owners, such as N.A.L.A (Nevada Association for Latin Americans), the Latin Chamber of Commerce, Nevada Hispanic Business Roundtable, Nevada Minority Business Enterprise Coalition and the New Ventures Capital Development Company.

As Lopez continued to work in Las Vegas, he developed a close professional relationship with African American community leader, Bob Bailey. Under the mentorship of Bailey, Lopez was able to learn how to effectively help the Las Vegas Latino community.

After years of helping members of his community establish successful business in the Las Vegas Valley, Lopez decided to lead by example and began his own, The Southern Nevada Courier Service. The Southern Nevada Courier Service worked closely with the University Medical Center (UMC), transporting medical supplies to their destinations.

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September 5, 2018

in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Laurents Bañuelos-Benitez

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**This is Laurents Banuelos. I am conducting an oral interview of Horacio Lopez. We are in the Reading Room in Special Collections. Today's date is September fifth, 2018.**

**Horacio, can I have you pronounce your name and spell it for me?**

Horacio Lopez; H-O-R-A-C-I-O, L-O-P-E-Z.

**Thank you. Like I mentioned, I want to start with your early childhood. Can you tell me what it was like growing up in New Mexico?**

I was born in a mining town called Tererro, New Mexico, northeast of Santa Fe, New Mexico. At that time recordkeeping was very lackadaisical, so I was under the impression for many years that I was born January 13, 1937. Then I went in the army, I got Q clearance, and I was working at the Nevada Test Site, under that date. But then about twenty, twenty-five years ago, I went to Santa Fe to the Statistical Department, the records, to get my birth certificate. They couldn't find it. Mother said, "You were baptized in Pecos, New Mexico."

We called the church and, sure enough, they had a baptism. She said, "Let me do some more research." She called me back a day later and she said, "I've got some good news and bad news for you." She said, "The bad news is that you have more than one name," and mentioned two other names. "And then the good news is that you are a year younger; you were born January 12th, 1938.

So now, referring to test site activity and the U.S. military, I've got to go back to 1937, and with current events I go to 1938; with medical insurance with Humana, 1938, and the Veterans Administration, 1937. That's how it is.

I was raised in a small village called Cordova that's between Santa Fe and Taos going up the high country. Everything was very pretty...We didn't have electricity. No running water; we had to haul water from the creek. We grew our own vegetables. We were never concerned during the Korean War and all those; we didn't even know it existed to a certain degree because we didn't lack for anything. We were self-sustained because we had cows, we've got hogs, we've got a garden and all that kind of stuff, so we were self-sustained.

The education system was also not very good in that area because there was no funding for those little hamlets. My father, he only had a second-grade education. He was an orphan and he had very hard times when he was growing up. He went with the nuns in Santa Fe, and they had him panhandling at the age of ten, eleven, twelve years old and that kind of stuff. At the age of about fifteen, sixteen, he became a miner in the mines in Colorado and southern New Mexico, Silver City, New Mexico.

Then when Los Alamos opened up, Los Alamos Laboratory in 1950, '52, it opened up new opportunities for that area. He came to Los Alamos and told them that he was a plumber, but he couldn't pass the exam. He had no clue what a plumber was. He said, "I meant a painter." Sure



enough, after haggling he became a painter in Los Alamos. He worked probably about ten years as a painter in Los Alamos. Then he formulated his own painting company in that area.

He was very meticulous, so he used to get like banks and institutions for painting and they hardly ever asked him how much he charged because he did such good work. They didn't care what he charged because the product was going to last for a long, long time.

With me, he said, "I want you to go to McCurdy Mission School." McCurdy Mission was an evangelical school and you had to pay so much. You had to board there. There were two schools, one in Albuquerque and one in Santa Cruz. I went to the one in Santa Cruz, McCurdy Mission School, and in Albuquerque it was Menaul. All my cousins went to Menaul and I went to McCurdy. I was somewhat mischievous when I was growing up. I went there in the eighth grade. My senior year I got suspended from that school for fighting. And then I went to another boarding school from there.

When I graduated, he was very proud of me graduating because he only went through second grade. During that summer I said, "Well, I'm going to join the navy. As a matter of fact, I've got to go there next week." He said, "I don't think so." He said, "You're going to go to Highlands University. I want you to go tomorrow. You're going to register at Highlands University." That's what we did and I went to Highlands University. Then from there I went to the University of New Mexico. I never got a degree, but I went to school.

My father was somewhat in the political field in those northern counties. It was like in Chicago where Mayor Daley controlled everything for years; in northern New Mexico one person controlled the destiny of all the people politically, and he was very tight with them.

I worked in the New Mexico Legislature in 1959. This particular person that controlled the county says, "I want you to get experience politically here. I want you to work at the legislature." So he says, "Get in the car." He takes me to Santa Fe. The legislature had started already. He calls out one of the assembly people, and he says, "I want you to give this boy a job here." He says, "But, Emilio, everything is filled up." He said, "Create one." They created Assistant Sergeant at Arms and that's what I was at the New Mexico Legislature.

During the summers, I used to work at the Land Office or at the Motor Vehicle Department during the summer. But between my freshman year and sophomore year in high school, I went to work in a ranch in Wyoming. My uncle was the foreman on this particular ranch. I went to work with him, mending fences and shearing sheep and all that kind of stuff, just a fantastic summer. I grew and I gained weight because we used to work six days a week—actually, six and a half, but it was that summer. I came back to high school and I was first eleven in football and first ten in basketball and all that kind of stuff. In high school, I was very popular. I was president of the junior class and all that kind of stuff. But again, I was very mischievous.

Then I went to college, like I say, and then I went in the army. I volunteered for the draft after serving in the legislative thing. I was in the army in Fort Ord, California, and then in Fort Irwin, California. I was in human resources in the army, so I had it made. When I was in Fort Irwin, here in Barstow, I used to come here [Las Vegas]. I came here two or three times. Of course, we were making seventy dollars a month or something like that, so I blew it right away, coming to Las Vegas.

Then after the army, I went back to Santa Fe. Before that I had many opportunities. In the army, I had so many opportunities that I turned down. Sergeant Shipman, a black man that was head of personnel in Fort Irwin, for some reason he took a liking to me. He says, "I want you to go to that language school in Monterey, California. The only drawback," he says, "is that you have to reenlist for another year." I said, "I don't want to do that. I don't want to stay in the army." He says, "I'm going to send you on TDY up there for a week. I want you to take a look at that language school." In Monterey, California, right on the ocean there. It was beautiful. I turned it down.

Then he says, "Why don't you go to officer's training school and become an officer?" *Nah*. "How about a warrant officer?" He tried so many things to get me.

I get out of the army and I go to Santa Fe. The largest real estate, Pike's Realty, wanted me to become a Realtor; they would sponsor me. *Nah, nah, I want to get out of here*.

I went to Denver, Colorado, and went to work for American Machine and Foundry Company. They were one of the companies building the Titan Missile program in Denver, Colorado. I started as a time changer, going around making sure that the craft were working because they had little badges. Then my boss says, "Hey, they've got openings in Moses Lake, Washington. If you want to go there, I'm going."

So, I went to Moses Lake, Washington, and there I became a project coordinator between quality assurance and testing control. I went from about eighty dollars a week to two hundred and three dollars a week. Then when the project was completed, I came back and I came through here [Las Vegas].

My brother was working here as a janitor at Nevada Test Site. So, I came here and I went to work with Reynolds Electrical and Engineering Company in the human resources department. I was a clerk. They sent me to the test site and some of the activity that I was doing was doing exit interviews of people leaving employment.

Of course, I had no clue about equal rights, affirmative action, nothing like that. We had never experienced that in New Mexico. I remember very vividly one other gentleman that was leaving. He said that he was being reduced in force because he was Jewish. That didn't mean anything to me, really. I didn't know anything about it.

After observing the hiring practices and the promotion activity at Reynolds, for some reason I started taking notes; names, notes and dates. After ninety days I quit Reynolds Electric. Bill Colburn was the head honcho there, my boss, and I told him, "I don't want to work here. I don't like these conditions. You've got double standards in the hiring practices."

So, I left and then I went to see the director of the Atomic Energy Commission that was running the test site. His name was Reeves. He looked like Elmer Fudd, a little guy. I went by myself. I told him what I was doing and why I quit the test site and the double standards. He got red in the face. He says, "I'll take care of it." Okay.

About a week later I get a telephone call and a telegram from Reynolds Electric. The manager then was Davy Crockett. There was an Ari Smith. Ari Smith was the finance director and he came from Los Alamos. He was half-Hispanic. And Ray McNeil. Ray McNeil was the director of industrial relations. They recently passed away. They had called me for a meeting.

I go to the meeting. As I walk in, they close the door behind me and all three are standing up. Davy Crockett says, "We have called you here because you've done three things wrong. Number one, you didn't follow the chain of command." I said, "Let me stop you there, Mr. Crockett, because I don't have a *blank-blank* chain of command. I don't work for you and I'll never work for your *blank* company." They looked at each other...*Yes, I quit last week.*

After that they must have pursued me for a month asking me to go back to work. Finally, I went back to work and I went to work in the accounting department and I stayed about ten years. But one of the conditions for me to go back and work there was that we have to have some meetings, and I formulated a committee of Hispanics, to have a meeting to ensure that past conditions would not exist again, because we had electrical engineering degree people from the University of New Mexico coming in as field engineers. We used to have accountants...I remember a little Gonzalez hadn't had a raise for eighteen months. This young lady without an accounting degree came to the accounting department and she had three raises in one year. People from Utah would come in with associate degrees, coming in as full-fledged engineers, and people with business administration degrees, Hispanics, coming in as housing clerks. I said, "Why?" During all these meetings—we had monthly meetings and then quarterly meetings—I used to make sure that I had my stuff together.

Then the time for contract renewal came into being, and it's common practice in big corporations to bring in heavyweights. For example, Reynolds brought at that time a gentleman by the name of (Schreiber) that used to work for LBJ in Washington to become president of Reynolds in order to submit the proposal to continue the contract. We had a meeting and Mr. (Schreiber) was there. Before the meeting was completed, he said, "Mr. Lopez, for what you have divulged here today, you should be fired. But as long as I'm general manager of this company, you'll never be fired." We had all kinds of stuff.

Then Ron King, another general manager, took a liking to me because he used to say, "You have more tenacity..." That kind of stuff. For example, he said, "The only difference between you and me is (15:52/indiscernible). Say, for example, that the boss would come over and say, 'We've got some money for raises. How much do you think you're worth, Mr. Lopez?' You would probably shrug your shoulders and scratch your head and probably say, 'Whatever you think is right, boss.' If they would come to me, I would say, 'Fifteen percent.' I will get ten; you'll get three because..." So, we had that kind of communication. He promoted me to different positions.

Then Reynolds had an employee on loan to the Department of Energy and the job of this particular person was to host the VIPs coming in to tour the test site. His name is Smith and he drowned at the lake, so that's why that opening became. Ron King says, "Why don't you take that job?" So, he took me to see Mr. Grier from EG&G, and Mr. Grier says, "The only disadvantage or negative from that job is you might have to see the same show two or three times. But we're going to operate out of my own personal budget because we can't use public funds for that kind of activity." As far as I'm concerned, fine.

Then we went to see someone at DOE; the manager's name was Miller. Mr. Miller was not committed. On the way to the office, I said, "Mr. King, do you think I should have Congressman Baring call DOE to make sure that everything...?" "No, no," he says, "I want you to have the job. Grier wants you to have the job. You have it." I didn't get it. Miller turned me down. Then they gave it to another guy that used to work in Information Systems and he screwed it up. In a year's time it became a federal job. So, there were many activities. I left Reynolds in '73.

**CLAYTEE: Tell me about your relationship with Joe Neal before you leave EG&G.**

Joe Neal and I worked very close at the beginning because of the activity that was going on. We became friends. Joe Neal and I were friends. Any time there was any action, any activity predicated on Hispanics, if not directly involved, I would be an observer. The division managers would call me and say, "I want you to come over. We've got a problem with so-and-so." Just be an observer; that's what I used to do. I used to be quite an advocate for equality. But Joe Neal did a fantastic job. He did a good job.

Then I left Reynolds Electric and took over SENCO, pneumatic tools for the construction industry, pneumatic nailers and staplers and that kind of stuff.

Before that, I was president of NALA for several years. Under NALA and the NAACP, that's when Bob Bailey and I came up. We decided to formulate a coalition and apply for funding from the U.S. Department of Commerce to assist minority business enterprises.

**CLAYTEE: What is NALA?**

Nevada Association of Latin Americans. Gil Flores, he was a VP of NALA, he and Bob Bailey started running NEDCO. Gil was a VP and Bob Bailey was the executive director. We got

money to assist minority businesses. For some reason, Gil and Bob Bailey didn't get along too well.

I'm driving my van for that SENCO Pneumatic Tools and my phone rang. It's Bob Bailey. "You know," he says, "I was clearing Gil's desk and I found your resume there." He said, "I want to talk to you." He says, "I've got a vacancy, deputy director of this agency, and I want to talk to you." So, I went over and talked to Bob Bailey. Once Bob Bailey grabs ahold of you, he's got you.

I went to work with Bob Bailey at Nevada Economic Development Company in 1975. During that time, we assisted all minorities, strictly minorities, no women or anything like that. That's when Congressman Parren Mitchell started, also with the Department of Transportation, getting into disadvantaged business enterprises, minority businesses and women and all that kind of stuff.

What Bob Bailey did was he formulated a committee, or his board of directors, and his board of directors was very diversified. The contractors at the Nevada Test Site had an organization they formulated after all that fracas we had before, what they called the Opportunity Development Council, and all the general managers of all the companies working within that umbrella were members thereof. Bailey always had the chairman of that council in his board of directors. Reverend Bennett, who was an assemblyman, was the chairman; then he had the president of the Latin Chamber of Commerce in it; the deputy director of the Nevada Department of Economic Development was in it; and then the president of one of the banks. So, my Lord, he had access and knew if he had a problem with financial activity, that person or that bank on that board would handle it. If he had problems with the public sector, the guy from the ODC would handle it. The state? We had the Economic Development deputy director there. Then Latin Chamber, Arturo Cambeiro, who was the architect of architects, was the person on that board, also. Like I said, Bob Bailey was twenty years ahead of his time. We assisted minority businesses where they got jobs at Nellis, they got jobs at the test site, the Bureau of Reclamation, the county, the city. Minority businesses prospered to a degree.

**LAURENTS: What was the state of Latino businesses before you guys came along helping the system? Was it tougher for Latinos to find jobs in Las Vegas?**

You've got to remember that when you're a minority and you want to go into business, most of your competitors are already running because they came from families that were in business already. For example, construction companies, the son took over the company, or the son created a subsidiary already with contacts and bonding activity and lines of credit and all that kind of stuff. Minorities, they started from scratch. To navigate the system is very hard and there are certain key words you need in the public sector in order to open doors, and Bailey and I did that for them.

We used to have conferences, national conferences. Here's one of the booklets on one of the conferences that we had. This is the Fourth Annual Regional Procurement Summit Conference. We had the CEOs of major corporations, the governor, senators. Ronald Reagan one time made a talk at the conference, not in person, but on video, and Senator Laxalt and Cannon and Bible. Senator Bible is the one that helped us formulate all this, so it was amazing. We even had what was called the Million Dollar Club of minority businesses. We had created like a bus company to haul passengers to the test site, Ray Ross. Bailey helped them. Lucky Seven Limousine, Bailey helped Willard Booth do that. Wesley Trucking and Wesley Corporation, John Wesley, we helped them formulate all that where they were getting million-dollar contracts. Hispanics, Ray Vega that became an entrepreneur sold his business for sixty-four million dollars when he left here to go to California. We helped him to a degree. George Lopez right now owns Amalgamated Safety Company. He's working on a billion-dollar project, the Neon project. We helped him. He's got a contract now for about twelve million dollars. Casas Electric, another one, an electrical company. We help companies get into the 8(a) program. 8(a) means Section 8 of the Small Business Act where public-sector entities would set aside a certain amount of money for those companies certified under the program. We were spearheading that all the time.

Bailey was so smart. They would handle out of San Francisco for us. He had his major contacts in Washington. So, when San Francisco was hesitant in something, they would get word from Washington, and then they did it for them, not for us. Under the Minority Business Development Agency, we always had a black or Hispanic being the director or a black or Hispanic being the deputy. If it was a Hispanic, I would cater to them, and the other way around, also. We were a good team. Bob Bailey and I were a good team. We used to play the good and the bad guy when we would go into meetings. He had a sense; he could enter a room and sense the attitudes of people and tailor his talk according to what he thought would work. He was amazing. For example, we used to make reports for Washington. He would say, "Lopez, why don't you start the quarterly report?" He had a way to criticize you or to evaluate you where you didn't know he had chewed you out until three days later. You know what I mean? So I would give him what I had written out and he would make all kinds of changes. But he would say to me, "Very good, you got it." He was amazing. I learned so much from that man.

**BARBARA: How long did you work with him?**

From 1975 until he died. We were just... He died, what, four years ago?

**BARBARA: Yes, it was recently.**

Then after that NEDCO that we had, then we formulated New Ventures Capital Development Company. That was for financial generations, to help minorities with finance, lines of credit and loans and all that kind of stuff. And then, besides New Ventures Capital Development Company, we had New Ventures, Inc. It was a consulting company where we monitored and worked for the Nevada Department of Transportation for about twelve years. We were the ones to insure that

minority businesses and disadvantaged businesses got a fair share of the highway work in the state of Nevada. There were goals, as a matter of fact, for many years. It came to the point where we had such a good relationship not only with the prime contractors in the state and (FFWA), but when NDOT was going to audit a contractor, like Frainer or Max Riggs, they would call us, "Can you be here?" Because if we thought that NDOT was wrong, we would say that. We would tell them that even though they were paying us. We would say, "Hey, Sal, I don't think that's right. That's not how we see it from here."

I was also a member of the board of directors of the business development entity here at UNLV. A guy out of Reno has an SBA grant. The largest portion of the money is up there in Reno and they had a small portion coming here. Larry Vierra and Mike...Mike died at an early age. Anyhow, I was on their board of directors, me and Victor Wei, a Chinese guy that is a financial consultant. I think that Victor Wei is now in the foundation of UNLV. As a matter of fact, I just had lunch with him two weeks ago and I think he mentioned that.

When we got here, we formulated many Hispanic organizations. We had a guy by the name of David Branch. He was a Hispanic from New Mexico. He wanted to run for the assembly, North Las Vegas. We formulated Latinos International and he got elected. After Latinos International, we formulated NALA, Nevada Association of Latin Americans. Under that NALA program, the ODC, from REECo, from Reynolds, gave NALA five hundred and fifty dollars a month for years, and the objective was to identify potential Hispanic businesses that could get work with them; and when there were vacancies for employment, if NALA had any qualified people, they would refer them to them. I was president and then I went to Los Angeles to identify Hispanic businesses in L.A. because we didn't have any here or very few here, and then that started that relationship.

**LAURENTS: Correct me if I'm wrong, but NALA's headquarters used to be located on Stewart and—**

And 13th.

**Yes, Stewart and 13th, right across from where the Latin Chamber of Commerce is now, correct?**

Yes.

**Outside of helping with businesses, they also helped with the community then, didn't they?**

Yes, they did, childcare.

**Actually, my parents used their childcare services for me and my siblings. What other programs did NALA do outside of businesses?**

I think they're out of business now.

**Yes, that location is elderly homeless, if I'm not mistaken. They went out a few years ago. But when they were active, what would they do for Latinos, outside of just the business, as far as community give backs? You mentioned childcare.**

Identify potential candidates for appointments to boards and commissions in the state, the county and the city. We used to have meetings with the various communities here to ensure that they knew we existed. Sometimes there would be certain grants for certain things. That kind of stuff.

The problem with Hispanic organizations is that we don't do follow-up properly. When you get to those organizations, everything is on commitment; you don't get paid and that gets old after a while. Minorities, especially Hispanics, sometimes we don't have the education or the vision as to what to do. We're thinking about now instead of thinking about tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, and that has been one of the failures of the Hispanic community in Southern Nevada. In Southern Nevada, Mexicans, like myself, are the largest portion of Hispanics, as you know. Then we have the Cubans, which is a very small percentage of the Hispanic agenda, but they control everything because they had something that banded them together to progress and to look up there and reach for the stars. We have never had that, Mexicans.

**CLAYTEE: What is that? What was that thing that they had?**

The Castro deal, having to flee Castro. No disrespect to anybody, the Cubans are like the Jewish people; they've got networks everywhere, and they believe in education. They get their people educated. One example, and he's been very good for all Hispanics, is Tony Alamo. Tony Alamo came here cleaning cigarette butts in casinos and became senior VP of Mandalay Bay and all that kind of stuff. But if you brought an issue to him or a person that needed a job, he would give that person a job. He helped a lot of people, Tony Alamo. Of course, his children are all... Tony Alamo, Jr., is a doctor and chairman of the Gaming Commission, and he can be anything he wants. That kind of stuff. I think his daughter is in education of some kind, a psychologist or something like that.

That's the difference between Cuban and Mexican; we don't strive that much for education, Mexicans, for some reason. Then we Mexicans are like crabs in a barrel; if one of us wants to climb over the thing, the other ones pull you back for some reason. New Mexico is the same way. Jealousies, I'm not kidding you.

**CLAYTEE: Do you realize that's the exact same description that people say of African Americans?**

No. African Americans are more aggressive. They're very aggressive. Look at how many are here. Look who is running the legislature and running for attorney general and everything. Hispanics, we barely have a few assembly people up here, and only one senator and he's Cuban.



But yesteryear, in the sixties, we had Hispanic elected people; Manny Cortez, for example. He even became president of the convention center. He came from New Mexico. We had David Branch, like I say. He was Mexican and he was an assemblyman. [NAME/35:59] from Henderson became an assemblyman. Art Espinosa became an assemblyman and very active in housing and stuff like that. For some reason, then compared to now, the few Hispanics that were here then, they were more active. Now we've got so many Hispanics...

And then there's a difference between those that come from the islands in South America than those that are domesticated and born and raised here. Those that are born and raised here hardly get involved in any of the activities, equal rights or affirmative action or all that kind of stuff.

**LAURENTS: Why do you believe that is?**

Because they have the attitude that I'm going to make it and make it on my own. Hispanics don't want to ask for anything. Too much pride, you don't want to ask anybody. *I'm going to ask him once. If he doesn't, to hell with it.* For example, when I was deputy director in certain projects, Cuban guys would be in your office until they got what they wanted, and that's what it takes to prosper in life. And Mexicans, they came once and if you didn't produce, *to heck with you*; if you did, *okay, appreciate it.* That's how it is.

**LAURENTS: Do you see that changing any time soon? What do you think is needed for us to change our attitude as a community?**

I think now with Hispanics getting into business and in highfalutin jobs now, they are encouraging and they're role models, and I think it's improving, yes. For example, there was one restaurant that we helped start up back in the seventies; that was Viva Zapatas. Greg Ramirez, we got him an SBA loan. He hired all Mexican waiters, and they all own Mexican restaurants here in town now. The Michoacán restaurant, Javier Barajas, he used to work at Viva Zapatas and now he is the largest Hispanic restaurant owner. Bobby Mercado, the same way; he was a general manager for Greg, and he owns Mercado's Mexican restaurant. And on and on. So, a lot of improvement, yes.

**LAURENTS: I want to bring it back a little bit to your parents. You mentioned your father, but you didn't mention much of your mother. Was she native New Mexican, or was she an immigrant as well?**

Yes, in New Mexico, yes. She was also an orphan. Her mother died when she was a baby.

**Were your parents born here or they migrated from Mexico?**

No, they were born in New Mexico. See, you've got to remember that the Spaniards came to New Mexico in the 1600s and established Santa Fe and all that kind of stuff. They brought some females with them, but then they started mixing with the Native Americans in New Mexico and mestizos and that's where we came from, like me. My parents or grandparents, there is no Spain,

there is no Mexico, no Nicaragua or nothing; they were all there because Santa Fe is the second oldest city in the country, 1610, I think, or 1608. St. Augustine, Florida is number one. In New Mexico, as a matter of fact, there were times in northern New Mexico where if you called one of the people there Mexican, they would get mad at you. *Spanish, I'm Spanish.*

**Thinking back to your childhood, were there traditions or food that your family upheld that were rooted in Mexican culture?**

Oh, yes, the tortillas, the beans, the chili, the potatoes. Like the old saying, for breakfast you have potatoes, chili and beans. Lunch: Chili, beans and potatoes.

**BARBARA: That's funny.**

**LAURENTS: Coming back to Las Vegas, what were some of your first impressions of Las Vegas when you first arrived here?**

You don't know how to act here in Las Vegas. It is an adult playground; it was then and it's still now.

**LAURENTS: How have you seen the Latino community grow in those years, not just businesses, but as a whole?**

Yes, it has grown a bit, yes. We've become very tribalized we all move to a certain area and that kind of stuff. There is no progress in those areas in education. That's why I tell some of my buddies that are in organizations, why don't you formulate a program where you try to educate young girls, *don't get pregnant? That's going to ruin your life.* Because that's what happens, young kids having kids, and that's not very good.

**CLAYTEE: Speaking of girls, you were so popular in high school. Tell me about the girls.**

Oh. I was light-complected, number one. Number two, I was a fairly good basketball and football player. I had many friends and everything. Usually the top cheerleader was my girlfriend when I was growing up.

**That's what I figured. Which area did you live when you first came to Las Vegas?**

My brother was here. When I first came here, he had a place up there in Pittman. That was the lower area of Henderson. From there we went to Fourth Street and rented an apartment there. Then after that I bought a house.

**The first house was where?**

On Valley View Boulevard, 1904 Valley View. It was a dirt road, Valley View.

**You never lived in a community that was heavily—**

Hispanic, no. In 1980 I bought a house on Decatur and Flamingo. We still have it, the tri-level that we bought in 1980.

**LAURENTS: You mentioned some of the discriminations that you saw working in Reynolds. Did you face any kind of discrimination while you were in the military for being Latino?**

I never knew anything about discrimination. But in the military when I went to basic training, we had this sergeant from Texas, and the sergeant said, "I need a detail to go do something." Usually the guy under him picks the detail. "You, you, and you," and looked at me. Then when he said *Lopez*, that sergeant from Texas said, "No, no, no, I want somebody that can speak English well." That's the first time that I ever...But it didn't dawn on me because I never experienced it. To me, I said, well, it's better for me, I don't go on detail. In the army, also in all that training, I was usually a squad leader or that kind of stuff.

**What about in education? Did you feel while you were educated you were being treated differently for being Latino?**

No, no. Because New Mexico Highlands University was a lot of Latinos there. University of New Mexico, the same way.

**Were the professors Latino in the universities?**

I don't recall. I don't think so, no.

**BARBARA: May I ask a question on the language because you just mentioned it? What was your relationship with speaking Spanish?**

I know Spanish, but not perfect Spanish because, like I say, in New Mexico we used to interchange English words with Spanish words and that kind of stuff; Spanglish I think we used to call it. No, no, I don't...To carry a good conversation with somebody that speaks Spanish well, I have a problem, but I understand everything that they say properly.

**CLAYTEE: In your New Mexican community, were there certain celebrations and festivals that were Hispanic based?**

Oh, yes. Yes.

**Give me some examples.**

In Santa Fe, they celebrate the Santa Fe fiestas, the burning of Zozobra. That's an annual deal that's been going on for years and years and years.

**LAURENTS: Can you tell us the history about that festival?**

I don't know it. I forgot all that stuff.

**CLAYTEE: That festival did not transfer to Las Vegas ever?**

No, no, that's strictly a Santa Fe deal. As a matter of fact, it was this weekend. It was Thursday through Sunday. Then in the small communities, you celebrated a saint's day every year, San Antonio and that kind of stuff, and that goes on every year still.

Then you have in that part of the country in a town called Chimayo, between Santa Fe and Taos, an old church called El Santuario de Chimayo where they have a little room where people go there and take dirt from that space and never leave a hole, like the dirt regenerates itself. People go there to the holy dirt and leave their crutches and that kind of stuff.

**CLAYTEE: Where is this place?**

In Chimayo. It's called Chimayo, New Mexico.

**LAURENTS: Did Catholicism play a big role in your family?**

Yes, a big, big role.

**Do you remember going to church every Sunday?**

Yes.

**What were the churches like in Santa Fe?**

There's a church in Santa Fe [Loretto Chapel] that a stranger came into town back in the 1700s and built a stairway in the church not using any fasteners of any kind and it still stands. Nobody knew who the stranger was, so they say. You've got some of the oldest churches. You've got to remember it's in 1600s. Santa Fe has been there since the 1600s. When you arrive in Santa Fe, you see the three distinct cultures immediately: the Hispanic, the Native American and the Anglo culture. Immediately you'll see it. All the architecture in Santa Fe is Indian pueblo style.

**CLAYTEE: The Latino population is going to be the largest population in the Southwest, if not already, real soon. What does that mean to you?**

It means that we have an opportunity to make changes for the better if we do it right.

**What is doing it right?**

Number one, thinking not only about today, but thinking about tomorrow and the day after. Let me give you an example. Here in Southern Nevada we formulated, like I said, quite a few organizations. We had an organization called the New Mexico Club, people that were born and raised in New Mexico that are here, and there were quite a few, about eight thousand or something like that. Manny Cortez, for example, was in it, and (Augie Garolla), who was the general manager of Holmes and Narver, was from New Mexico, also. We used to have banquets. One of the reasons was that when county managers, city managers and the governor had

vacancies for boards and commissions, they usually funnel all those; they used to go to the Latin Chamber of Commerce, and the Latin Chamber of Commerce would identify who they wanted to recommend. I was on the board of the Latin Chamber several years and I was involved in the beginning, not directly, but I was involved in the formulation of the Latin Chamber of Commerce. When Governor Miller was appointing people, we went to see Governor Miller, some of us from New Mexico, and we said, "Governor, we have a cadre of very qualified Hispanics that could be eligible for appointments to boards and commissions under your administration, but we don't know, to a degree, what's available because you're sending everything to the Latin Chamber of Commerce."

"Well," he said—and you know Governor Miller—"Every time I go to any function with the Latin Chamber, all you guys are there. So I assume that that was the main focal point. From now on, we'll be sending that stuff to the New Mexico Club, also." We started recommending people for that. We had quite a few.

Going back to Bob Bailey very briefly, Bailey was on the Taxicab Authority Board, and when he left I got appointed. I took his position in the Taxicab Authority Board. It was weird, yes. We used to meet with city managers and everything and talk about the Latin population, how they could get exposed to vacancies. As a matter of fact, at the City of Las Vegas, we had a deputy city manager, Orlando Sanchez. We got another manager of the department. Then the Public Works director, now he's an assistant, Hispanic. Quite a few Hispanics joined the City of Las Vegas. In the county, the same way, and in the state the same way.

Another job that I turned down for the state was when Governor List was governor. I was affiliated with a gentleman by the name of Charlie Bell. Charlie Bell was Congressman Baring's chief person, executive, and he got him re-elected ten times, twenty years. We only had one congressman in the state of Nevada for many years. Charlie Bell was the congressman's main protagonist. His wife and my wife were working together at Reynolds. They became friends and then Charlie and I became good friends.

I'm again driving down the road one day and I get a call from the governor's office. He says, "Hey, Mr. Lopez, Governor List would like to appoint you directorship of economic development. But first we want you to go see Sig Rogich." I went to see Sig Rogich and Sig Roich says, "Charlie Bell that wants you to be director of economic development, so as far as I'm concerned...But let me call..." A Hispanic guy that was deputy attorney general because Robert List was attorney general and this guy was his deputy. "I want you to go see..." I can't remember his name. So I went to see him, also. He said, "Yes, it's yours if you want it. Charlie Bell wants you. Sig Rogich wants you." He says, "You have to move to Carson City and this is what it pays."

That's when I was working at NEDCO. I turned it down because I didn't want to move to Carson City. That was a mistake again. I've had many opportunities in this community.

Besides having the consulting company with Bob Bailey, we invested some in real estate. And then I owned a courier service, Southern Nevada Courier Service that I started in 1982, number one, for tax purposes. Then I got certified 8(a) and I had jobs with the test site and that kind of stuff. I just recently retired from it because I had a contract with UMC delivering medical supplies and all that kind of stuff. From the Quick Care centers, we used to pick up blood and all that kind of stuff to bring to the laboratory. I had that contract for eight years. It went out to bid and I decided to bid high on it. I figured if I'm the only bidder, I'll get it; if I don't, fine. The end of June is when I closed down Southern Nevada Courier Service. I've had that entity, also.

**LAURENTS: What made you want to get into the courier service?**

Being a consulting business, I figured if I'm going to consult other people and urge other people to get into business, I better lead by example so I'll know exactly what it takes to get into business, the practical experience. Most entities, economic development companies that are getting paid to mentor businesses and to give them advice, everything is theoretical. If you don't have practical experience, you don't know anything; that's what they call intelligent, yet idiot. You're intelligent. You've got all the Ph.Ds. and everything, but you don't know any of the practicalities here. Sometimes if you're a doctor like that and you've got to remove a wart from the back, you go through the stomach. Look at all the damage.

**BARBARA: That's true.**

**LAURENTS: You mentioned that you started the New Mexico Club. What do you think attracts Latinos from New Mexico to come over to Las Vegas? Because you mentioned there were quite a few.**

It was opportunity. The educational system in New Mexico, especially northern New Mexico, is very lackadaisical. Most of the state of New Mexico is...New Mexico is the bottom one on a lot of things.

**How do you compare the Latino culture in New Mexico to the Latino culture you found here in Las Vegas?**

It's different. Even the food is different. In New Mexico, for example, you go to restaurants in New Mexico and *sopaipillas* is part of the staples just like getting chips, and here you've got to pay extra for the *sopaipillas*. Then the portions in New Mexico are bigger and the price is cheaper and everything is genuine. They grow their own chili in New Mexico and the beans. They grow all that stuff. Here everything is imported.

**I have one more question. You talked a lot about how you helped develop and spearhead businesses. For you what is the ultimate goal for the Latino culture, not just in Las Vegas, but as a whole? Where would you like to see us ten, twenty years from now?**

That's a good question, a very good question. I think what the Latino culture has got to do is quit being taken for granted, especially politically. I'm a Democrat, but I look at the Democratic Party and all they do is take advantage of us. For example, in minority business, a Republican administration started that; Nixon started minority business. In the Democratic side, all they do is keep us happy with giving us crumbs, go into welfare, grants for this and grants for that. We never prosper that way.

Our leaders, because, again, you see communities where it's only led by minorities, they usually are on the downside, most communities. The question is, why? Is it because we're not fully educated? We don't have the practical entities to run these entities? What is it? Some companies that deal with the federal government, if they don't have mentors, they go down also. Again, what is it that we need? I think that the minority legislators that are coming on, they've got to start looking at that. There's all kinds of examples on how to be successful, not that you've got to reinvent the wheel. But instead of pacifying us with giveaway programs, no, give us a little challenge. You've got to remember that most successful people have failed once or twice. I was just reading an article about Macy's. The guy that started Macy's failed four times before he started Macy's in New York.

**CLAYTEE: Bob Bailey, being a Republican, made the difference?**

Bob Bailey was very fair. Bob Bailey knew which side of the aisle would produce certain things that he was looking for, and it was the Republican Party. The Republican Party at points, minorities, they hired positions without any hesitation. The Democrats, all they want to give you is those positions where you deal with social issues. Put us in commerce. Put us in Department of State instead of just Labor and Health and Human Services.

**BARABRA: Break the stereotype. I'm not looking at your bio sheet, but did you marry a Latina?**

No. I married a Swedish lady.

**LAURENTS: How do those cultures mix within your family with your Latino culture and her being Swedish?**

When we used to go to New Mexico, my mother and father spoke Spanish, especially my mother. My mother was very limited in English. Everything was by reinterpretation.

**BARBARA; And you had children?**

Yes.

**How did you raise them culturally or to understand their cultural background?**

They used to look at me and we had good conversations and then with my wife also. All my kids got highly educated. We had three children. The oldest one used to work for Senator Bryan in

Washington and then here in town. After that she went to work for the City of Las Vegas. In 2002, she had a major seizure and died.

**BARBARA: I'm sorry.**

Then my son was a percussionist and he was going to join Lenny Kravitz on a Monday and got killed in a car accident on a Friday.

**BARBARA: Oh my.**

Then the third, the daughter, the youngest daughter, she works for the City of Las Vegas. She's got her master's degree from here and she works for the City of Las Vegas.

**CLAYTEE: The very last thing: What does this kind of project, interviewing people in the Latino/Hispanic community, what does this project mean for the community?**

To me it means that other people will hear what people like me feel and what is recommended and that kind of stuff because with different ideas you can come to a good constructive solution. I think you guys are doing a good job, a good job for being your initial interview.

**BARBARA: This is Laurents' first official interview for the project. I think it's wonderful. It's really wonderful that you came in to join us here.**

You are doing a great job.

**CLAYTEE: This is great. Thank you so much.**

I really thank you for inviting me.

**[End of recorded interview]**