

**Voices of Feminism Oral History Project**  
Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College  
Northampton, MA

**ELIZABETH (BETITA) MARTINEZ**

interviewed by

LORETTA ROSS

March 3, 2006, Atlanta, GA  
August 6, 2006, Oakland, CA

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## Narrator

Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez was born December 12, 1925. As the child of a dark-skinned Mexican-born father and a white Euro-American mother, Betita met discrimination as she was growing up in segregated Washington, D.C.

During World War II, Martinez attended Swarthmore College, where she was the only non-white student on campus. After graduation in 1946, she worked at the newly-established United Nations, where she researched decolonization efforts and strategies. In the late 1950s she became an editor at Simon & Schuster, and later Books and Arts Editor of *The Nation* magazine. She also became active in the U.S. civil rights movement, directing the New York office of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and participating in SNCC's Freedom Summer in Mississippi in 1964.

From 1968 to 1976, Martinez lived in New Mexico where she became founding editor of *El Grito del Norte* (The Cry of the North), a monthly community newspaper that linked the Chicano land movement to similar struggles around the world. She served as founding director of the Chicano Communications Center in Albuquerque to teach Chicanos about history and contemporary issues.

After moving to California in 1976, Martinez joined the Democratic Workers Party, a Marxist group led by women, and became involved in Central American solidarity work, local struggles for social justice, and grassroots organizing to save public services. In 1982 she ran for Governor on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket. In addition to teaching ethnic studies and women's studies on several campuses, she traveled extensively to observe efforts to create socialist societies. Her travels included trips to China, the Soviet Union, Vietnam, Hungary, and Poland, in addition to several trips to Cuba beginning in 1959. In 1997 Martinez co-founded the Institute for Multiracial Justice which promotes alliances among communities of color on a range of issues. She edited the Institute's newsletter, *Shades of Power*.

Martinez' publications include *The Movement* (1963) and *Letters from Mississippi* (1965; reissued 2002), and *De Colores Means All of Us: Latina Views for a Multi-Colored Century* (1998). Her bilingual book *Five Hundred Years of Chicano History*, first issued in 1976 as *450 Years of Chicano History*, is in its sixth edition. She is completing another bilingual book, *Five Hundred Years of Chicana History*, a pictorial survey [published 2008]. She is a frequent contributor to anthologies, including *The Feminist Memoir Project*, and to *Z* and other progressive magazines.

Martinez has received numerous awards for her social justice work. In 2005 she was a nominee for the 1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize. Martinez lives in San Francisco where she continues to write, lecture, edit and teach.

After a brief first marriage, Martinez married Hans Koning, author of 40 fiction and non-fiction books. In 1954 they had a daughter, Tessa, before divorcing. Tessa, an actress, lives in San Francisco.

### Interviewer

Loretta Ross (b. 1953) became involved in black nationalist politics while attending Howard University, 1970-73. A leader in the anti-rape and anti-racism movements in the 1970s and 1980s, she co-founded the International Council of African Women and served as Director of Women of Color Programs for the National Organization for Women and Program Director for the National Black Women's Health Project. After managing the research and program departments for the Center for Democratic Renewal, an anti-Klan organization, Ross established the National Center for Human Rights Education in 1996, which she directed through 2004. Also in 2004, she was the Co-Director of the March for Women's Lives. In 2005 she became national coordinator of the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective. The Loretta Ross papers are at the Sophia Smith Collection; the Voices of Feminism Project also includes an oral history with Ross.

### Abstract

This oral history offers a general overview of Martinez' life and work. Martinez reviews her childhood and her political experiences from SNCC forward. She discusses the difficulty of sustaining left groups in the face of sectarianism and government infiltration. Martinez comments on current domestic and international politics and reflects on tensions between her activism and her role as a single parent.

Restrictions: none

### Format

Interview recorded on miniDV using Sony Digital Camcorder DSR-PDX10. Three 63-minute tapes.

### Transcript

Transcribed by Kerin D. Ogg. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Revan Schendler. Edited and approved by Betita Martinez.

### Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

#### Video Recording

**Bibliography:** Martinez, Elizabeth (Betita). Interview by Loretta Ross. Video recording, March 3, 2006, and August 6, 2006. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote example:** Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez interview by Loretta Ross, video recording, March 3, 2006, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, tape 1.

#### Transcript

**Bibliography:** Martinez, Elizabeth (Betita). Interview by Loretta Ross. Transcript of video recording, March 3, 2006, and August 6, 2006. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote example:** Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez, interview by Loretta Ross, transcript of video recording, August 6, 2006, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, pp. 54-55.

Voices of Feminism Oral History Project  
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Transcript of interviews conducted MARCH 3, 2006, and AUGUST 6, 2006, with:

ELIZABETH (BETITA) MARTINEZ  
Atlanta, GA; Oakland, CA

by: LORETTA ROSS

LORETTA ROSS: Good afternoon. It is March 3rd, 2006, and my name is Loretta Ross, with the Voices of Feminism Project, of the Sophia Smith Collection of Smith College. And it is my pleasure and honor to be interviewing Betita Martinez, also known as Elizabeth Martinez, for our Voices of Feminism Project. Hello, Betita.

MARTINEZ: Hey! Glad to be here.

ROSS: Now, you prefer Betita?

MARTINEZ: I'm sort of used to it. [Betita is] my nickname and I write my books as Elizabeth, so whatever you feel good with.

ROSS: I feel good with whatever you feel –

MARTINEZ: I've kind of moved more into the Betita category of late, yes.

ROSS: OK. Well, why don't we start by getting some basic facts out of the way? When were you born? Where were you born? And tell me your parents' names.

MARTINEZ: I was born in Washington, D.C., December 12th — which is the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which is a big holiday in Mexico — and that was 1925. And my father was Manuel Guillermo Martinez, from Mexico, and my mother was Ruth Phillips, very much from the United States. And that's my parents.

ROSS: Now, Ruth Phillips — that doesn't sound like a Chicana name. Tell me a little bit about her background.

MARTINEZ: No, definitely Scotch-Irish-whatever background. Well, she married my father and became a complete Mexican-phile, if that's the right word. She became a Spanish teacher. We went to Mexico every year for the summer, and she became completely involved with the culture and in teaching the language. So there was a lot of mutual support there.

ROSS: OK. So it was very special, them getting together at the time?

MARTINEZ: It was very special.

ROSS: What was the context of their marriage, and how were they treated as a mixed-race marriage, as they would have called it?

2:00

MARTINEZ: Yeah. The context was bizarre, because at the time, Washington, D.C., had about 20 Mexicans in it, maybe 25. No Mexican restaurant. You had to go 20 miles out of town, to Pepe's or something. And the only reason, I think, that we didn't have such a hard time was because my father was at the embassy, the Mexican Embassy. He had a secretarial job there, which he got after many years of sweating and surviving in the United States. And then my mother became a teacher.

So it was only more everyday things where we ran into problems. My father was very dark. He came from southern Mexico. [His father was a judge in] the state of Oaxaca originally, and very dark. At the time — in the 1920s — the busses were segregated in Washington, D.C., so we got sent to the back of the bus, even though the front seats were empty. I did not understand that when I was five years old. "Daddy! Why do we have to do this?" "I'll tell you later, I'll tell you later."

So there was that, and it was very, very strange, very strange to grow up half-Mexican in this city. Anyway, so the schools I went to were all-white, starting in kindergarten, and through high school, and even through college. And people would sort of look at me. I remember in elementary school: Are you Hawaiian or something? "No, I'm Mexican." Well, what's that? "Well —" So it was like being a zero. And the little girl next door whose family was white, she was not allowed to play with me because my father was Mexican.

And so it was very isolating, but you know, I was lucky to feel loved, and held it together because of my parents — they were so wonderful — and also because I just was really friendly with all of the black folks who came to work for my parents, you know? And so I liked them, I hung out with them, and I felt good with them. So it was a strange life in that way. It was very lonely in one sense, but I think — I don't think I was so aware of it as I might have been otherwise.

ROSS: Did you have brothers and sisters?

MARTINEZ: No, I had no brothers or sisters, no, none at all. So.

ROSS: So you're an only child?

MARTINEZ: I'm an only child, which I don't recommend! (laughs)

ROSS: So you didn't have any brothers and sisters growing up?

MARTINEZ: No.

ROSS: Did you have contact with other members of your family on either side growing up?

MARTINEZ: Went to Mexico every summer and saw my cousins and aunt and stuff there then. And some relatives on my mother's side, my uncle and his wife, my aunt, saw them for holidays. It was not a whole lot of frequent contact. It was mostly my parents, yeah. They were both teachers, so.

ROSS: So you're describing a segregated Washington, D.C., in apparently the 1930s, during the Depression?

MARTINEZ: Right. (phone; pause in tape)

ROSS: Since, as I estimate, this took place roughly during the Depression in segregated 1930s Washington, D.C., how did the segregation and the Depression have an impact on your developing consciousness?

MARTINEZ: Well, I think I mentioned the segregation piece of it, in terms of how it affected me personally, which was a weird way, because not being black, but being something else, which was not at all recognized as any part of the whole racial paradigm. It was sort of like nonexistent in a way, except for those moments of prejudice. But anyway, I think that I felt like a freak, not like somebody so much discriminated against. I mean, if you're a freak, you're discriminated against, but it's a different kind of discrimination. And I knew there was something — I always wanted blue eyes, so I knew there was a color issue involved.

But in terms of the Depression, the main thing I remember about that is that I wanted to have my teeth straightened, and my family couldn't pay for it. (laughs) So for the rest of my life, I think, Why didn't you get my teeth straightened? Anyway, so they weren't rich. They were both teachers, but they weren't making a whole lot of money.

And then much later, after the Depression, it was possible then to get some kind of money to build a house in the '30s. I don't remember a program or whatever it was, but there was something. So they got some money to build a house, and they built a house, and that was it.

And then I went to all public schools, and kind of bumbled along, I guess. I sort of hung out with the quote "intellectual crowd" in high school (laughs) — the non-football players, you know? We went to basketball games, not football games. So I guess I think already I was a bit of a loner. I hung out with the other loners, in high school. And so it wasn't really, really so acute, but I knew there was something — there was injustice in this world, and I could feel that, and I knew it.

And my father talked about it a lot. My father's education in seeing the Mexican Revolution, which he saw as a young man in Mexico, was unmistakable, an unmistakable event, because he was so happy and

positive about the Zapatistas when they came into Mexico City and he saw them come in, hundreds of *campesinos* in their white clothes on horses. And then when the Marines, the U.S. Marines, bombed Vera Cruz, trying to stop the [Mexican] Revolution [of 1910], [my father denounced that in no uncertain terms].

Anyway, so I grew up with a sort of anti-imperialist consciousness, and pro-Latin American consciousness. So there was that piece of it, which wasn't exactly fitting in with the racial paradigm, but it was there, and it was political. So that's sort of where a lot of my identification went at time.

ROSS: So were there significant events that happened to you or happened around you that kind of jerked that consciousness into activism?

MARTINEZ: Well, I think the main thing I remember — and my memory at this point is a little shaky — is World War II. I remember the day the war started. I remember just where I was when I heard the news about Hitler had invaded Poland. And I was horrified. I was in college then. I went to Swarthmore College, which is a Quaker school, a relatively progressive Quaker school. Of course, I was once again the only [non-]white kid in the school, but there was a certain political bond that I had with the school in terms of the kinds of work it was doing.

The war really, really appalled me, and for reasons I can't even remember now, I kept the newspaper. I was a news junkie already then. I kept the newspaper every single day of the war, and it was in my bedroom in big stacks. (laughs) After a while, you could barely get into bed past the newspapers! And then I was horrified about the concentration camps, and I read all about them. So I had a lot of awareness of injustice.

And the day they dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima and then next on Nagasaki, I said, "This is terrible. The world will never be the same. This is awful, awful, awful." I mean, how could they go killing hundreds of thousands of people like that? So anyway, I decided — I guess when I was in college I was already some kind of radical on campus — and I decided that when I got out of college, I wanted to work at the United Nations and bring about world peace.

Well, the U.N. was only one year old then, two years old, and I happened to go to school with the daughter of Ralph Bunche. Ralph Bunche was a high-up in the United Nations, and so through her, I got a job in his department. One of the departments he was running then was the department that was called the Department of Trusteeship in Non-Self-Governing Territories, which was basically former colonies. And that's where I got a job doing research.

Well, it did not take me long to figure out that there was a great big connection between colonialism and racism — that they had a whole lot in common. I figured that out pretty fast. And at the U.N., my job was to read the reports that were submitted to the United Nations' Trusteeship Council — like the Security Council, like the other councils — by the

10:20

colonial powers. And I read those reports, and they were horrible. I mean, I guess, Belgium had one doctor for 100,000 people in Rwanda Urundi, [or something like that, and it was the same for the other trust territories] like Southwest Africa [now Namibia], as it was then called. And then also the U.S. colonies in the Pacific, one of which is still — Western Samoa — is still a U.S. colony.

Anyway, so I saw these just terrible statistics. How can you have one doctor for 100,000 [people]? The head of my department, his name was Jack Harris, he went to the University of Chicago and he'd been in the Communist Party, the youth Communist Party. So we were a couple of little radicals there. And he said, "You know what we're going to do? We're going to give some of this information from these reports that we're reading, we're going to give them to one of the friendly delegations at the Trusteeship Council and let them expose the colonial powers with them at the next big meeting in Geneva!"

Well, so that's what we did! (laughs) We were completely, completely wrong — bad, bad, bad! The Secretariat, which I was in, it wasn't supposed to meddle with nothing, right? But we just couldn't stand the colonialism, so that's what we did. At that time, the Philippine delegation to the United Nations was a very progressive delegation, and so they were the people that we gave this information to. And they used it to embarrass the colonial powers — that's what we wanted to do. That's the most we could do from sitting inside the U.N. But that was a lot of fun! Oh, boy. So it went off to Geneva, you know?

Anyway, the little story that goes along with this is that at that time, I took a ship from New York to Paris, then a train to Geneva, to the big meeting of the Trusteeship Council. And then the train, the train was like those compartments like they have on European trains, little compartments. And I was in a compartment with another man, and then a woman on the other side [was a] white woman who looked like she was asleep the whole time.

But I was talking with this guy, and he was on his way to work at the World Health Organization in Geneva with the U.N., and he was very worried. He said, "I just don't know how much good I can do. I just don't know how much good I can do to help all these hungry people." "Oh," I said, "well, you can do things! Let me tell you what we do!" (laughs) So I told him the whole story about feeding the information to embarrass the colonial powers. "Oh," he said, "that sounds really cool!"

So we get off the train, and then I go to my hotel, and the next morning, I report for work at the Trusteeship Council meeting. And I walk in the room, and I look over at the U.S. delegation, and who's sitting there? The white woman from the train. (gasps) She's with the U.S. delegation! (gasps) She reports me. I have to be fired immediately. [But the man who fired me, a friendly Yugoslav boss, hired me back the next day, probably on the grounds of it being impossible to replace me overnight, the staff shortage, etc.] But that was my first lesson in security: don't run your mouth in front of people you don't know! (laughs) I learned that one, and I was only 21!

ROSS:                    Well, before we go on further into political activities –

MARTINEZ:            It's a long story, but it's this sort of — I was already a little troublemaker, yeah.

ROSS:                    What was happening in your personal life? Tell me briefly the story of your personal life. Did you get married and have kids?

MARTINEZ:            Oh yeah! I got married, that's right. I got married. I got married to a Jewish guy, because I really felt bad about the concentration camps, and I wanted to go off to build a commune, I guess, in the New Israel. That's before — and I thought we could do that together.

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ROSS:                    So you married him –

MARTINEZ:            I got married. I married him. We had kind of a partnership.

ROSS:                    – out of displaced guilt? Because you weren't responsible for the concentration camps. (laughs)

MARTINEZ:            No, no. But that was my dream, to go help build — but then of course what happened was he didn't want to go. I did. So I wasn't going off by myself. Anyway, things kind of didn't work out, so.

ROSS:                    What was his name?

MARTINEZ:            His name was Leonard Berman, B-E-R-M-A-N. And he was a nice guy, but it just sort of didn't work out. So then I met a new guy who had just arrived from Indonesia and wanted me to help him write a book. So I got into some writing stuff then, and eventually, we got married, and I had my daughter.

ROSS:                    And his name?

MARTINEZ:            Hans Koning. He's a writer originally from Holland, but many years in this country, and he's a very good writer.

ROSS:                    Could you say his name again?

MARTINEZ:            Hans — H-A-N-S — Hans K-O-N-I-N-G.

ROSS:                    That was a Jewish name.

MARTINEZ:            No, no. Dutch.

ROSS:                    Dutch name?

MARTINEZ:            K-O-N-I-N-G, but Dutch, yeah, Dutch. I know, when there's an "e" in there — K-O-E — it's more often Jewish. Anyway, so.

ROSS:                 When was your daughter born, and what's her name?

MARTINEZ:            1954.

ROSS:                 And what's her name?

MARTINEZ:            Her name is Tessa, T-E-S-S-A, and I named her, of course, at the time because I was fascinated by the books of Thomas Hardy, an English novelist, including one that was called *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. And I liked that name, Tess. But then I thought, Tess? I don't know. Let's make it Tessa. So we add an "a" on the end. So that was kind of a literary influence. I had majored in English literature in college, and yeah, I was kind of a writer type.

ROSS:                 So her full name is.?

MARTINEZ:            Tessa Koning Martinez, or Tessa Martinez Koning. She uses all her names as an actress.

ROSS:                 She's an actress now?

MARTINEZ:            Absolutely. She's an actress, she's an actress. Yeah. Actresses have — you know, they often have hyphenated names to — I don't know, whatever. So yes, she's a wonderful actress.

ROSS:                 Has she presented you with any grandchildren?

MARTINEZ:            No. No grandchildren, no. So she's also an only child. This only-child business goes on too far, but anyway.

ROSS:                 So after you left the State Department — was it the State Department or the U.N. you were at then?

MARTINEZ:            No, it was the U.N. Secretariat, yeah.

ROSS:                 At the Secretariat at the U.N.?

MARTINEZ:            Yeah, yeah, and that's after five years.

ROSS:                 And what was your next expression?

MARTINEZ:            Five years, and what happened then was five years, and then the whole McCarthy period hit. My boss was fired because he'd been in this Communist Party youth group at the University of Chicago umpteen years before. And I really didn't like what was going on with that at all,

17:00

so it was the whole purge of anybody with any leftist history who worked in the United Nations Secretariat who was from the United States — shoo! out! It was the whole McCarthyist period, and so I left there. I guess that was about '52. My daughter was born a couple of years later. And then I got another — I got a couple more jobs. I got a job with the Delegation of India to the United Nations, which was headed by Madame — Madame —

ROSS: Gandhi.

MARTINEZ: Right. That was who I worked [for, as a sort of accountant and office person, in 1954, until the Friday before Tessa was born on the following Monday. I couldn't waste a nickel, as I was married to an as-yet unpublished writer husband.

After Tessa was born, I worked at the Institute for International Education, [another office job, just two blocks from my apartment so I could go home at lunchtime to care for Tessa and relieve my husband. So I was sort of bopping around at the time.

And then I ended up getting a job. It was in New York, at the Museum of Modern Art, in the photography department, which was then run by Edward Steichen, who had just done this fabulous exhibit called The Family of Man. And I was sort of interested in photography. So I applied for the job, and the only reason he hired me instead of five thousand other people who wanted that job was because I knew nothing about photography, so he knew I wasn't going to argue with him about anything! But it was a peak period in photography then. All kinds of young new photographers were just blooming all over the place, and I met them all. It was a very exciting period to be involved with photography, and I got very interested in doing work with photography from then on, which is why I did some picture books after that. So yeah. And then what happened?

Then — good Lord — then I guess I was there a few years, and then I went to work at Simon & Schuster as a junior editor, and then an editor. But what was really important was that, as you know, in the '50s the whole civil rights movement exploded in Montgomery. And I was very excited about that. And then I was asked to help on the case of Robert Williams, who had been accused in Monroe, North Carolina, of kidnapping this white couple. They were really after him because, unlike most NAACP heads, which he was there, he had organized some young people to fight back when the Klan came in and shot up the black neighborhood every Saturday night. And the kids would just fire back at them. Well, we didn't do that. Anyway, so they were out to get him, so they had an incident to charge him with kidnapping a white couple, which he was in fact defending them. And so I was asked to work on that, on his defense campaign. So that was '59, early '60. So that was my first direct involvement with any kind of black movement stuff. I'd done the support thing before then.

20:00

But then came 1960, then came the sit-ins. Then came SNCC. (sings) “Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee!” There really was a song like that, I just can’t sing it! (laughs) So then I joined with — in New York, there was a support group, Friends of SNCC. There was Friends of SNCC groups in many different cities, and the one in New York happened to have several editors in it, and I was an editor, and I got asked to join it. So that’s what I did.

I actually got a book done at Simon & Schuster called *The Movement*, which is really a beautiful photographic history of the movement, with text by Lorraine Hansberry. And it’s all photographs, and it’s terrific. So I got that book done, with the royalties going to SNCC. So I did stuff like that. And I kind of got books done by various Spanish Communist writers and stuff. [After five years at Simon and Schuster, I was offered a job as Books and Arts Editor of *The Nation* magazine, and was happy to take it for about a year.] But then came the ’63 Birmingham bombing of the church that killed the four girls, and I said, “I’m out of here. This ain’t no more part-time job for me.” So anyway, that’s —

ROSS: Well, before we go on, weren’t you director of the New York office of SNCC?

MARTINEZ: No, that’s after. This comes up now. Yeah, that’s when I said, “I’m out of here. I’ve got to be with this full time.” So I quit my job and went to Mississippi for SNCC in ’64, the big Mississippi Summer project, when all the volunteers came down and duh-duh-duh. And I came back. I was asked to put together a book of the letters that the volunteers had written home, which had been collected by the parents’ committee. And so I did that, and this book, *Letters from Mississippi*, came out, which just got reissued, by the way. I just gave a copy this morning to our friend, and —

ROSS: Jerome Scott?

MARTINEZ: Yeah. And he’s going to give it to somebody. Anyway, so then after that, Jim Forman asked me to coordinate the New York office, which was a support office, fundraising and media, and occasionally in action — go chain ourselves to the door of the Federal Building, kind of stuff. (laughs) And I actually replaced Marion Barry, who went on to D.C. to become the mayor, and you know what else. So yeah, I was coordinator of the New York office at that time. That was a couple of years. So we got up to the New York office.

ROSS: So at what point did both your gender consciousness and Chicano consciousness begin to emerge?

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MARTINEZ: I think probably they kind of started almost at the same time, actually, because — let me think. I was still in New York up to 1968, OK? And somewhere along the line, I was asked if I wanted to join a women’s

group in New York City, which was a hot little group, it turned out later, with some of the major white women leaders of that time. It was the New York — something — women's group. But I was the only woman of color in it.

ROSS: And not the Redstockings, or –

MARTINEZ: No. No, no. There were very good women in the group, and I went to several meetings, and it was good. But then one day, we had a meeting scheduled for the night that Martin Luther King was assassinated. So I go to that meeting, I am not prepared to talk about anything except that assassination. And I get there: nobody's even talking about it! I said, What the shit is this? I'm outta here! I mean, this is just too white for me.

So I left. I never went back. I remember walking down 14th Street in New York City, looking at these — there's a lot of big department stores and stuff there with great big glass windows. I look at those big glass windows, I think, Hmm, if I had a rock, I'd do something! (laughs) I was ready to throw something, you know? It was just so upsetting. So anyway, I kind of maintained a connection, but at somewhat more distant level.

And then that was also the year when the whole picture with SNCC was kind of beginning to decline. SNCC was talking about forming an alliance with the Black Panther Party, which didn't work out very well for various reasons that you probably know about, and Eldridge [Cleaver] and so forth and so on. And so it was a whole lot of ideological confusion, confusion about where do we go from here, and there was a group in Atlanta that was very much more inclined towards Islamic beliefs and having nothing do with white folks, and Jim Forman was saying we need to study Marxism, and took a group to Africa. I mean, there was different pulls, but there was no one clear vision that prevailed at that time, and the only thing that some people were clear about was getting rid of the white folks in SNCC, but even doing that didn't (unclear).

So they didn't know what me and Maria Varela were — nobody quite knew. Neither did we. I was just SNCC, you know? That's all. I'm SNCC. That's what I am. I wasn't even thinking any other way. And I don't think she was either, to tell you the truth. So nobody kicked us out, but nobody kicked us in, either. I don't know. (laughs) We weren't black; we weren't white. At that time, as you know, there was no — the racial definition in this country was strictly black and white.

ROSS: And “other.”

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MARTINEZ: And “other.” That's right. We were “other,” exactly. “Other.”

ROSS: Now, I'm from San Antonio, and in the 1960s, the late 1960s in particular, that's where the Chicano movement came out of our barrios.

So, were you paying attention to that, and how did that have an impact on you?

MARTINEZ: How that happened was that I had made many trips to Cuba. I went there [in March or April, 1959] right after the overthrow of Batista. Three months after the revolution, I went to Havana. Wow, that was it! I said, “This is what the new world could be like,” you know?

ROSS: So you went right after '59, and then you went ten years later?

MARTINEZ: No, I went in '59, right after the overthrow, and then I went back in '60, '61, '68 with Stokely [Carmichael] and Kwame Ture and George Ware and Julius Lester — the whole SNCC delegation at that time. So anyway — sorry, I'm getting lost in all my places here.

ROSS: The Chicano movement, I had asked you about.

MARTINEZ: Oh, that's right! OK. Let's get to the Chicano movement. So then John Gerassi, whom I had met in Havana, who was an author and a professor — he was one of the leading scholars on Jean-Paul Sartre, the French philosopher. So he came one day, he said, “How would you like to go to New Mexico and help start a newspaper there of the land-grants swindle?” I said, “What? I'm a New Yorker. I don't know jack shit about New Mexico. How am I going to go there and tell those people what to think? No way, José!” But he said, “Oh, just come for a few days. Visit — there's a friend there you can stay with,” blah-blah-blah: Beverly Axelrod.

So I thought, Oh, OK, I'll just go for a little break. I got off the plane, I looked at those mountains, I smelled the air: I fell in love. I never left! (laughs) I sent for my stuff to be shipped to me. I stayed six years. It was love at first sight.

But I thought to myself, you know, it's just another front in the battle against racism. And that's what it was, because New Mexico was much more colonial than any other area, but it was all the same damn racism. And so I never felt like I was breaking any life pattern; I was just shifting to another front. And the newspaper we put out, *El Grito del Norte* — which we did start with Beverly's help — that newspaper was started, I want you to know, on the same typewriter as the first Black Panther Party newspaper, the same typewriter, all right, because she had brought it with her when she moved to New Mexico. We also had in the room the big chair that [Huey Newton] was always photographed in, that great big imperial chair.

28:35

ROSS: That was you all's furniture? (laughs)

MARTINEZ: That was our furniture, right! So it was kind of all very continuous. And the paper also, it didn't stick to just Chicano and Chicana issues. We dealt a whole lot with other issues, all kinds of land struggles in

different places around the world, and also what was happening in this country, the Black Panther movement, Angela Davis, the San Quentin Six. So it was a kind of international paper, although the focus was on the Chicano struggle, and the land struggle in particular. It was a good paper. It came out regularly, every month for five years, every month on time.

And we had a lot of support, and it did become a paper that the local people felt associated with, which was what I was concerned about. And I thought, I'm not going to go there and talk to them. But we got a lot of local people involved in it, and there's a very militant tradition in New Mexico, which you don't have to scratch too far to find. It's there.

ROSS: Tell me about that.

MARTINEZ: It was there. Well, it's the oldest land struggle. They've had underground organizations there for a long time, burning the barns of these gringo ranchers. Anyway, so I liked that sort of thing.

ROSS: So you were there in the midst of the development of the Chicano revolution?

MARTINEZ: Exactly, at the height of the land struggle — which was different from Texas, and different from California, Southern California. New Mexico was its own thing in a lot of ways, and in some ways more basic, because they were fighting to get back their whole damn land, you know? So anyway, I thought that was exciting because naturally, I was a happy little socialist. I wanted to get the land back, so. So yeah.

ROSS: Did you observe interaction between the emerging Chicano militancy and the indigenous militancy of the area?

MARTINEZ: Yeah. There was a lot in New Mexico, more probably than other places. And yeah, we had a lot of articles about — the paper, we would work with folks. We went up to Taos Pueblo. And I went with a delegation — anyway, yeah. We cooperated a lot. And of course, every now and then, the Native folks would sort of look at these Chicanos who were starting to wear feathers in their hair and say, Well, I don't know. These imitation Indians — (laughs) They were right.

But it was pretty tight, you know. And I always felt that we had a lot to learn from them, because they understood that you had to think in terms of struggles unto the fifth generation, not just today, what you could do today — that whole long-range view, and the feeling of the land. I mean, you go from concrete New York to the land of New Mexico, and it is another world and another way of looking at life. When you're right on the land — and I think rural people understand this better than city folks sometimes do — being close to the land, there's something very basic about it, you know? That's what produces life, and a lot of what keeps us going a lot of times. And I loved the

31:30

land. So it was a very enriching and deepening thing to be that close to the land. And yeah. Wow, it was just — I loved it.

ROSS: Did you experience any difference in treatment in terms of your leadership because you were a woman?

MARTINEZ: Mmm-hmm. Time to get back to the great gender question, I know. So, I think when I got there at first, because I was older and had a college education, there was a whole lot of sort of respect for me — and I'm editing a newspaper, and I'm working with a lawyer. I never felt, with extremely rare exceptions, any kind of gender bias. Sometimes, there'd be little formalistic things, like (laughs) I'd go to the house of one of the courthouse raiders.

There was a famous courthouse raid by 20 guys in New Mexico who, they took over the courthouse in the northern [part of the state] — because of what the district attorney had done to repress one of their meetings, I think. So anyway, I go to their house for dinner, you know, and I sit down. And then the guy would say, "Oh, that's where I sit." So I mean, all right. I would accidentally sit at the head of the table. "That's where I sit."

But that's fairly mild. In general, there was just a lot of respect, and I think it was based on the idea of my background and experience and age and education. So because of that — I didn't want any class thing to come in, though. And you know, I never felt that. Maybe I'm wrong. But I never felt that way except with one young guy. He said, "You're awfully middle class." That was a young Chicano. He was probably right. But with the older people from the rural areas — these are mostly rural area people — I never felt, you know, put in a box. So I don't know. I think it was age, also. I was older, and we could sort of relate that way.

But in terms of the women's movement, OK. Somewhere along the line there, it had really blossomed, because the people I worked with who did a lot of the hard work of the newspaper were women. The ones I cultivated and taught how to do journalism and how to put a newspaper together were young Chicana women, and that's what was the backbone of that paper, in my opinion. And so, I remember struggles, like one of the young women who was actually married to the brother of the big land-grant movement leader, she wanted to go to a conference out of town. I thought she should go, and the paper could pay her way, and her husband didn't want her to go. "I haven't approved this." So I had an argument with him about that kind of thing.

And so these issues would come up from time to time, and I just learned two things. First of all, a lot of the women in northern New Mexico were like the women I had met in rural Mississippi. They were Fanny Lou Hamers — only they spoke Spanish — in northern New Mexico. Same kind of older, tough ladies who had seen it all, and the same kind of strength, you know? So there was just nothing you could do except respect — a whole lot — those women.

34:04

And so I think that all that added up to — it kind of fed a feminism that grew with time, and grew so that I would have arguments with some of the guys there. They would say — you know, I would take a stand for women on some issue, and some guy would say, “Oh, you’re awfully *agringada*,” meaning, acting like a white woman, like a *gringa*. *Agringada*, like a white woman. So you know, they would play that game of, you know, saying feminist women were not in accordance with the so-called culture if they didn’t act submissive. Anyway, I didn’t go for that, and I didn’t let them get away with it, either.

So it was a period of affirming feminism for the women I worked with and respected, and defending it against some of the men who tried to make us either *agringada* or divisive. Either we’re dividing the movement, or we’re acting like white women. And there were young women who were intimidated by that, and I saw that happen at a couple conferences. There was a famous one in Denver, Colorado, that the Crusade for Justice called in 1969 — yeah, wow — where after much struggle, they finally agreed — this was a big, national Chicano youth conference in Denver, Colorado, at the Crusade for Justice. And there was a famous — infamous — workshop that women fought to have, just a women’s workshop.

Well, they finally managed to get it, over the dead bodies of half of the guys or whatever. So I went to the workshop. And what came out of the workshop? It was the consensus of the workshop that we don’t want to be liberated. OK. Well, what they meant by that was, we don’t want to be like the white women’s liberation movement, that’s not our thing. That’s what they meant, but it sounded terrible! (laughs)

ROSS: We like our enslavement!

MARTINEZ: We don’t want to be liberated! Oh my god! But I’m — thinking about it more, they just were rejecting identification with a movement that they saw as mostly middle class and mostly white women, mostly anti-family, men-are-the-enemy. And that was a struggle, because for all of kinds of reasons, including the cultural reason that the family, the traditional family, had been seen as a bulwark of defense against an inimical racist society, you know, you can face the world with it, and so who wants to tear it apart by saying, you know, the men should wash the dishes or whatever? (laughs)

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Anyway, so that was part of the problem, I think, people seeing it as an attack on the family per se — the nuclear family. So it was a struggle, and the whole emergence finally of what you could call Chicana feminism came much later, largely with academics and students. So. OK?

ROSS: Well, it takes place where it takes place.

MARTINEZ: Yeah, right.

- ROSS: But even in those early formations, did you see women resisting violence against women?
- MARTINEZ: Not as much as they should have. Too often, they just shut up and left, or hid, or whatever. They probably did and didn't talk about it. And there was — you know, that's a good question, because I bet there was a lot of stuff happening that I never knew about. But I remember one example, which is not so much against violence, but the same guy who wanted me to — he had to sit in his seat [at dinner], right, this same guy started messing around with another woman, OK? The word got out. This is a very small town, like two hundred people. It was a mistake to do it, let's put it that way. And how do they deal with it? A group of about six women got together and went to "talk" to him. They "talked" to him. That was the end of the problem. They didn't have to beat him up or anything. It was just six women from the community that scared him to death or something. So it was the end of that affair.
- So there was that kind of collective strength/pressure manifested sometimes. And it probably happened also with the physical violence thing. I can't think of any cases that I know of except one in Seattle. But anyway, it's a good question. I should go back and snoop around.
- ROSS: But that's a very good, indigenous response to violence and subordination of women without involving the state.
- MARTINEZ: Oh, yes. Right, exactly. Exactly.
- ROSS: So that's a model that really needs to be examined.
- MARTINEZ: It was just the numbers, that strength in numbers. That's what did it, yeah. (laughs)
- ROSS: Exactly. Oh, I love it.
- MARTINEZ: Yeah, yeah.
- ROSS: So — what? You stayed in New Mexico for five years or six years?
- MARTINEZ: Eight years. I stayed there until 1976.
- ROSS: And then what did you do?
- MARTINEZ: Oh, OK. Then I — it's 4:35. We've got some time.
- ROSS: We're going to get in — one more tape in before we go.
- MARTINEZ: I know, yeah. OK. Let me see. There were various projects I worked on in New Mexico. The newspaper, we closed the newspaper down consciously, not because we ran out of money or anything, but because

40:45

we thought we needed to reach people with other media — people who don't necessarily read. Organizers used the newspaper, and that was what it was for, but we thought, Let's try to reach more people directly with other media. So we closed down the paper and moved to Albuquerque from the north. Northern New Mexico was our base originally, and that was the most militant part of the state.

So we moved to Albuquerque, which was the big city, and started something called the Chicano Communications Center with some of the same folks, but with new people from the city. And we did things like we had speakers come in from other countries, other parts of the United States; we started a theater group; we used other media to try to get the word out in a movement way. And it went on pretty well, I thought. The theater group was just great, with some great plays, and very good consciousness stuff.

And then — let's see. My father became very ill, and — oh, OK. Backing up a minute. It's only '74. [In] '75, we did this book, *Five Hundred Years of Chicano History*, which was our answer to the about-to-be celebration of this quincentennial of 1492–1992.

ROSS: But I thought it was called *Four Hundred and Fifty Years of* –

MARTINEZ: It was originally called *Four Hundred and Fifty Years*, that's right. Later on, it was five hundred, so we had to change the title. So that was our response to the quincentennial celebration, which we didn't approve of at all, because who — this dude Columbus comes over here and messes with everything, including millions of Indians. But anyway.

So we did that book, which it was an amazing success. I mean, it's still in print, people still use it, artists still get images from it. It's amazing. It was another example of the pictorial communication thing, which I've always believed in strongly, the images communicating in a way that words can't always communicate, or at least not the written word.

So we did that in '75, and then — I don't know. At that time, I was beginning to think, Well, we need to be part of something bigger. There's a whole lot going on in this country in the mid-'70s. Some of the movements have slowed down; the Native movement's growing, duh-duh-duh. But where are we? We're getting to be a little bit too isolated, I felt.

So we started talking to other national organizations, and they would come through — the alphabet soup would come to visit, because they heard we had a really tight group in New Mexico — and it was a really tight group, with about 20 really committed activists. And they would come through. So the Communist Workers Party, and the October League, and the this and the that, all these Marxist parties would come through. And we were interested, and we started a study group to study Marxism. We sent off folks to Cuba. We sent off two people to China on various delegations to learn about what was going on there. So everybody was thinking in terms of a bigger vision. And we had a

couple conferences, and people were — those were conferences in northern New Mexico. Oh, we're all for communism! Sure! Let's go! I mean, northern New Mexico is *wild*, let me tell you! (laughs)

Anyway, so then my father became ill. I left Albuquerque to be with him and with my mother, and in that period of time, one of the alphabet soup came along and scooped up the Chicano Communications Center, and adopted some very sectarian politics — very sectarian politics. For example, they didn't like the book *Four Hundred and Fifty/Five Hundred Years of Chicano History* because it didn't take a strong position on Soviet social imperialism. Well, we didn't think we were supposed to do that in a Chicano history book, but anyway.

And by the time I got back there, folks had been lined up and they were in this very strange place. Most of them had been won over with these very sectarian politics. And it was part of the whole process that I had helped to launch, reaching out to these other socialist parties, which was what was happening, and the party-building movement was at its height in the early to mid-'70s. But this was not the gang that I thought we should hook up with, but that happened to be the gang that was mostly Chicano, and that's what — that nationalist hook is what got people —which is another whole tape.

So, eventually I decided to go and look around elsewhere, and I came out to the West Coast a couple of times and had friends out here, and I thought, Maybe I should go see what's what out in California. So I came out and I stayed. And what did I do? I joined another alphabet soup. (laughs) Anyway, this one at least was run by women, so.

44:20

ROSS: What was it called?

MARTINEZ: The Democratic Workers Party, which was the only Marxist party led by a woman. It was a white woman, but a very working-class white woman, and I was attracted to it because the leadership was all women.

ROSS: What was her name?

MARTINEZ: Marlene Dixon, who went on to become a disaster of a dictator, but yeah. So that's what I joined, and found out later that one of the people involved back in New Mexico who had brought down several projects there was probably an agent. I'm almost sure he was because of the way he worked and did things.

ROSS: So you're saying that it's very possible that COINTELPRO had an impact on your organizing?

MARTINEZ: Yeah. I'm sure that kind of force did. Yeah, COINTELPRO, or their cousin or whatever, yeah.

ROSS: Their Chicano cousin? (laughs)

MARTINEZ: Their Chicano cousin, that's right, Chicano cousin. I would've thought they had some black cousins, too. Anyway, yeah. So that's what happened then, and I'm finally on the West Coast now.

ROSS: So you were married by then?

MARTINEZ: Unmarried! I had various gentlemen callers, shall we say? (laughs) My second husband, Hans, who's a very good friend to this day, we keep in touch a lot, because he's also a writer, and our daughter Tessa. We're very good friends. But we got divorced, and he remarried and has a nice family, and I'm still hanging out with the gentlemen callers now and then. I'm getting a little old for them now, but I'm always ready. Anyway. (laughs)

So yeah. Anyway, that's how we got me to California. Actually, I moved out here to stay with Beverly Axelrod, whom I had known back in New Mexico, and her work with the Panthers and all that stuff, until she died not long ago. So.

ROSS: So when you came to California, you started working with the Democratic Workers Party.

MARTINEZ: Party, yeah. And I did that from '77 to '85 — a long time.

ROSS: A good long time.

MARTINEZ: Yeah.

ROSS: So again, there seems to have been an expansion of both the anti-imperialist, antiracist —

MARTINEZ: Anti-capitalist, yeah. You're right — the whole thing, right.

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ROSS: — work happening for you. So what were the things that were influencing you in California?

MARTINEZ: Yeah, OK. Let's think. I guess the very first — well, several things. The first work I actually did here, the first paid work, was with the Data Center [in Oakland]. It was revising a very important book they did about the police, [*The Iron Fist and the Velvet Glove*]. So I got interested in that, and then also I moved into a — to stay with some friends in Oakland, one of whom was at that time a [former] political prisoner in Argentina. Her name was Olga Talamante, and she is originally from Gilroy, California, a daughter of farm workers. Went to visit some friends in Argentina because she was studying Latin America, was hanging out with these activists, got picked up; they had literature in their car; she got thrown in prison and tortured for a year. She was a U.S. citizen. So her case was also on my mind then, and she got out thanks to a big campaign, and she now heads the Chicana/Latina

Foundation in the Bay Area, which is very, very good friends of — we're very good friends. They do scholarships and stuff like that.

And the first thing I got involved with politically was the Stop the Bakke movement, OK? This guy named Bakke, English — a white guy who did not get admitted to the medical school, I think, at the University of California at Davis or something like that. And he charged that he was not admitted, although there were people of color admitted instead of him whose grades were less, and blah-blah. So he brought a suit, and it went up to the California Supreme Court.

ROSS: Of reverse discrimination?

MARTINEZ: You remember the Bakke case? OK.

ROSS: Yes, and we protested that, too.

MARTINEZ: Oh, yeah, right! Well, so I worked on the Bakke case. That was the very first activism I did [in the Bay Area], now that I remember. And I got hooked up with some more alphabet soupers from that. So I did that first, and then — so the data center, Bakke case, and other things. So I was doing those different things for quite a while, and then I got into this party pretty soon. And the party — you know, it did some amazing things, boy. If the leadership had just been better.

At the time, when Prop 13 was on the ballot — which was to reduce the taxes of homeowners, which basically gutted the whole budget for health care, schools, everything — libraries, the works. And so, the leader of our organization saw the dangers in that very well, and instead of just protesting it, which we did do, she got a measure put on the ballot to tax the big corporations as a way to make up for the budget loss from Prop 13, seeing that it was going to pass. It was a great campaign. We had so many folks of color in on that. I mean, half the damn organization was black, which is no small thing in San Francisco.

And it almost passed. One point, we lost. Whether it would have been implemented or not is another — because this was to tax, you know, these — like Standard Oil and all these people. But it was a great idea, and it was so good because people really latched onto the idea of taxing the big corporations, and the next step to that is like, socialism, you know? I mean, it's really taking down the whole capitalist system and challenging it. And people were ready for it. They were just so ready for it.

And anyway, but then we blew it. Or she blew it, or we all blew it together. But it was very inspiring to be in that organization for many years, yeah. So — well.

ROSS: So when did you begin to meet with and become familiar with the radical black activists of northern California?

MARTINEZ: Yeah. Well, I guess my — let me think. And I think we really do need to wrap this up pretty soon, huh? It's almost –

52:50

ROSS: It's a quarter to five.

MARTINEZ: Quarter of five?

ROSS: We said that we'd leave at 5:30.

MARTINEZ: What did we say?

ROSS: Five-thirty, to get you there by 5:45.

MARTINEZ: To be there at 5:30. So, OK. I should be starting to walk out of here by 5:15 and pack up my bags. So we've got time. I'm one of those time junkies — I mean, watch junkies. I hate them, but.

ROSS: But I'd asked you about black radicals, right?

MARTINEZ: I know. No, we'll at least get that far.

Well, see, I always stayed in touch with Phil Hutchings. We never lost touch. Phil Hutchings was the last so-called program secretary, which was the leading role at SNCC at the very end. He was like the last chair, in effect, until it folded completely. And Phil and I always stayed in touch. I'm not quite sure why. We were always buddies. Well, he was in New Jersey when I was in New York, and I kept in touch with him, and also with LeRoi Jones/Baraka. And so I had some contacts from there also, and some of that carried on over to the West Coast. And then Phil eventually ended up moving to the Bay Area also. And so I met various folks through him. I'm trying to remember. I'm going to forget stuff, you know?

Well, the party I was in was very, very low on black folks — very low. And there were some really — like Rod Bush? Rod Bush, who went on — he's now at St. John's University, near D.C. He's a terrific scholar, and he wrote a book called *We Are Not What We Seem*, which is a history of black nationalism. It's a really cool book. He's writing a new book now which I love the name of, which is *The Fall of White Supremacy*. (laughs) I said, "Rod, how're you going to prove that?" (laughter)

ROSS: We should be so lucky.

MARTINEZ: I want to see it! I want to see that book! (laughs)

Anyway, so yeah. So he was in the party, and I knew a few folks through him. But it was small. And then I did know, I guess, more Latino people through Olga and other folks who were in the party. And then by '85 — OK, [in] '85, the party folded, I was out of there, and then, what did I do after that? I did some work. I did all kinds of really

rinky-dinky work, like I got a whatchamacallit job, you know, those temporaries? I was a temp. I was a temp at various places, including a law office, which got me three thousand dollars out of the police department when they beat me up at a demo, so it was working there. (laughs) Anyway. So you know, that was a Central America activism solidarity stage, also. Also with apartheid, that movement. So it was mostly solidarity stuff that I was doing — very little local stuff that I can remember. I think one thing with a clinic. Anyway.

ROSS: Well, you weren't personally opposed to abortion, for example, even though you didn't —

MARTINEZ: Oh, no. No, no, no.

ROSS: So how did you develop your thinking around that?

MARTINEZ: Oh, well, I mean, I always saw that as a woman's right to choose either way, and worked with Luz Alvarez Martinez, whom you have on your list there. They had a really good position. They said, We have the right to choose. We can choose having children or not, and if we choose having children, they've got to be healthy. They've got to have proper care.

So the right to abortion was under the overall umbrella of the right to choose and to have everything go with it that should. So that's kind of been my position also, which includes the right of abortion. But I'm just saying it was not just narrowly that. It was a whole concept that particularly poor women and poor women of color should have the right to childcare if they want to have children and so forth. And if they don't, then they have the right to abortion.

ROSS: Well, did religion have a major influence on your thinking?

MARTINEZ: I don't think so, no. OK. Poor me: I was supposedly baptized. My father was a typical Mexican Catholic, which means he went to church on Christmas, and that was about it. But I was supposed to be baptized, because I think my mother had agreed to that or something, in some deal. Well, anyway, they didn't get around to it until I was two years old. (laughs) And the priest, he couldn't catch me. I ran away. This poor fat priest was chasing me up and down all the aisles in the church to catch me and baptize me. Anyway, that's another story.

But I don't think so, except in a very basic spiritual way. I think church as an institution, not very much, although I still, when I walk into a real big Latin American Catholic church, it is awesome, I admit. But it's more a feeling of strength from some kind of collective something or other. And I think there was a spirituality also in New Mexico. So I think this feeling of spirituality has always been there, just not the church, and so it wouldn't get in the way of women's rights, either.

- ROSS: Well, we're coming to the end of part one of your interview.
- MARTINEZ: I know. We got something done, yeah.
- ROSS: I'm sorry we've had to foreshorten it because of the canceled flight, and you've now got to get out of here earlier to catch a flight. Do I have your permission to reschedule for part two?
- MARTINEZ: Yes, of course. Of course.
- ROSS: We will try to make it happen –
- MARTINEZ: Of course. Yeah, no.
- ROSS: – as much as we can.
- MARTINEZ: Right. And some things may — I may remember some things better this time also, coming around.
- ROSS: Well, a lot of people say that, but the natural flow is really what's precious.
- MARTINEZ: OK.
- ROSS: A lot of people have your writings; not as many people have you talking about what it meant.
- MARTINEZ: OK. Running away from the priest, that's true. There's not too many people have heard that story.
- ROSS: (laughs) Exactly! That's why oral histories are so precious, because that's not the stuff we bother to write down. And so, would you consider contributing your papers to the Voices of Feminism Archive at Smith College?
- MARTINEZ: I should think about that, because I promised them somewhere else, and if I'm promising them, then — which I think I will do, because what I heard is that the woman who is the librarian of the Chicano Studies Department at UCLA, which is a kind of a big thing, she asked me for my papers when she came up to help me, and she went through my file cabinets for hours looking at everything. And she finally got me to agree to give them to her, which I thought, That's a good place for them to be. But then later on, I heard that the way they treat people's papers is not ideal.
- ROSS: Because the state schools don't have the resources like private schools.

MARTINEZ:            They don't have the resources; they have the access. So then I started thinking twice. So then Cherríe Moraga over at Stanford said, "What about Stanford?" So I'm up in the air about it. But I certainly feel like I owe you at least –

ROSS:                 You will consider Smith?

MARTINEZ:           I owe you at least a consideration and thinking about it. And it might be very good. It's just like — so.

ROSS:                 OK. Well, we barely got to the 1970s.

MARTINEZ:           I know!

ROSS:                 And we may have to come back for part two. But again, on behalf of Smith College, thank you for allowing me to do this.

MARTINEZ:           Thank you very much. But next time, I get to hear from you more. Ha ha ha!

1:00:38

END TAPE 1

## TAPE 2

MARTINEZ: Oh, we barely got to the 1970s last time, and let's pick up from there this time.

ROSS: Yeah. Well, my name is Loretta Ross. It's August 6th, 2006. I'm in Oakland, California, at the home of Betita Martinez. Thank you, Betita, for agreeing to part two of your interview for the Smith College Voices of Feminisms Project. I hope you are well?

MARTINEZ: I'm fine. I'm very glad to be here with you. We finally got together again!

ROSS: It took a while.

MARTINEZ: Yeah.

ROSS: Why don't we start this portion of the interview from your move to San Francisco? What caused you to move to San Francisco, and what have you done since you've been here?

MARTINEZ: Well, I came here because of a sort of smashing defeat, shall we say, in New Mexico, in the final years I was there, when I sort of thought, OK, we are here; we have a great group of people here. The Chicano movement as a whole was fading, and we were looking for a larger vision, a larger strategy, that group of us that were working together in New Mexico, basically in Albuquerque.

So we talked with various national organizations on the left. They would come through town, and they would visit with us, and we would talk with them. The October League came down I guess from Denver, and then there was the Revolutionary Union, and all these different left parties — they were being called then parties. The '70s were the years of the party-building movement, and we certainly were looking around into that. And we didn't really like the parties that we spoke with, mostly because they seemed to be mostly run by white folks, and they didn't understand the land struggle, which was very important in New Mexico. So we said, Uhh, I don't think so.

And then came a contact with the August 29th Movement, which was named for the August 29th, 1970, the year of the big moratorium in Los Angeles against the war in Vietnam. Three Chicanos were killed by the police that day. So we had a little —

ROSS: Tell me a little bit more about the August 29th —

MARTINEZ: About the movement?

ROSS: — event.

MARTINEZ:            About the moratorium?

ROSS:                 Because I didn't know about that in 1970.

MARTINEZ:           Well, it was a major event and mobilized about 30,000 Chicanos in Los Angeles against the war — and I'm glad you asked me about it, because most people don't even know that the antiwar movement was not primarily white folks or anything else. But at one time, 30,000 Chicanos did come out against it — and also, of course, a whole lot of GIs. There's a whole antiwar GI movement that's been neglected, too, except now there's a wonderful new movie about it, called *Sir! No Sir!*

                            Anyway, we were very supportive of this effort scheduled for August 29th, 1970, was the date picked in Los Angeles. And we even put out a special issue of our newspaper, which had a front page that had pictures on it from Vietnam, and pictures from rural areas of New Mexico, and it had people doing the same things. So one picture was a farmer out in the fields preparing crops, in Vietnam, and the same kind of activity in northern New Mexico. Another one was a woman cooking in the kitchen; same kind of picture northern New Mexico and North Vietnam. So the point we were making was, Hey, you know, we have a lot in common with these people, especially the rural areas, and so why on earth are we trying to kill them?

                            So it was a really, really cool issue in support of this demonstration. So we hopped in our car in New Mexico and got the newspapers from our printer and started driving to Los Angeles. Got there, and I was supposed to speak at the event, which was a huge rally at the end of a long march through East LA. And so I'm there to bring greetings from the movement in New Mexico to the people there and support the movement against the war.

                            So I walk up to the podium in this huge park, and I look out there, and I see something very strange, which is I see about a hundred cops lined up facing me on the other side of the park, and they looked like they were moving towards us. So, hmm. So then I saw a little tear gas, and I thought, I'm not sure about this speech I'm about to give. And they got closer and closer, the tear gas was flying. And I said, I'm sorry, I'm outta here. And I dropped my speech and ran. I ran across the street, into the home of an Asian family, and a bunch of people were running into that house to get away from the tear gas, so that's where I ran in.

                            Anyway, in the course of day, three Chicanos were killed by the police, the best known one being a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* whose name was Ruben Salazar. And he had been publishing articles in the *New York Times* criticizing the police for brutality and this and that. He was sitting after all this excitement in a bar called the Silver Dollar Café, and just having a beer and relaxing, you know? And there's a whole lot going on outside, but he was just cooling it.

                            And suddenly this officer by himself comes up outside the Silver Dollar Café, kneels down, and fires a huge tear-gas canister into the Silver Dollar Café, which blows off the head of Ruben Salazar, the

4:30
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reporter who had been criticizing the police. So as you can imagine, a lot of peoples were very suspicious. Why did this guy shoot into there? And he killed this reporter. And there was a lot of protests against it. And in the course of the day, two other Chicanos were killed: a young Brown Beret and an older man whose — he just simply went through a police barrier thing because he didn't understand the English, that he was being told to stop and so forth. So they just shot him.

So there was quite a — it was an ongoing protest all night, all night, all over the city. I mean, windows were smashed in the stores. Police cars were turned over. It was a very major event, and unfortunately, the investigation into the cause of this event, on the killings, ended up with, you know, the cops were completely cleared of anything wrong. So that major event lead to the naming of this organization, the August 29th Movement, which was, you know, very much against that kind of police action, and anti-imperialism and the war and everything.

So we had started talking to them, and they were mostly Chicano people in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and elsewhere. And at that moment, as I said in our first tape, my father was found to be very ill with cancer. I had to leave right away to help my mother and help him. And I was gone, like, over a month or two. When I came back, I found that the August 29th Movement people, ATM, had taken over the Communications Center that we had built there, had destroyed two other projects. And they were very, very narrow-minded, sectarian, everybody's-wrong-except-us kind of left organization, of which there was a lot at the time.

So I came back, and I found out this had happened. I also found out that the second printing of the book we had done — which at that time was *Four Hundred and Fifty Years of Chicano History in Pictures*, bilingual; it later became *Five Hundred Years* — that they had shredded the entire second printing, on their orders, August 29th orders. They shredded the book, all five thousand copies, because, number one, it did not take a position on Soviet social imperialism, as they called it. Why we were supposed to do that in a book on Chicano history, I have never understood. On top of that, we did not take a position that Chicanos are a nation. We were supposed to say we are a nation, like black nation. But we weren't so sure. We were not positive that was the correct way to put it.

So anyway, they shredded all those books and so forth. And it became pretty impossible, to me, for me to continue working there. They also attacked me as a bourgeois feminist. Ooh! A bourgeois feminist! And so it became kind of impossible to continue. What had been built there as something you could call the beginning of a movement was essentially destroyed by these people with their very sectarian ideas. So I thought about moving at least temporarily to the Bay Area, where I had friends. So that's basically how I came here, and I actually did not go back to New Mexico to work, except, you know, on a specific project now and then.

So here I am, in Oakland, and meeting with groups around there, and they included representatives of the ATM, who came to talk to me because they heard I had been there. And they had evidence, they said, that among the people in the ATM movement in Albuquerque, there was an agent. Oh, OK. So maybe this agent launched this whole attack on the book, on me, on everything. And that seems very possible to this day. I can't prove it, but I have an idea, and so do other people have an idea of who the agent — actually two — were.

So that kind of thing was going on in those years, late '60s, early '70s. And all the different movements, including the movements of color, especially the movements of color, were being undermined, attacked, or attempted to be destroyed by government forces.

ROSS: Well, a lot of younger activists may not know about this attack by the government, so could you describe what was happening in terms of the government response to activism at the time?

MARTINEZ: Yeah. Well, there are so many examples of that, I think. The example I gave in New Mexico was to try to completely undermine, derail, or whatever you want to call it, the efforts of the Chicano Communications Center, which was the group I was working with, which included several other groups having come together as a coalition we called CLARO [Chicano Liberation and Revolutionary Organization?]. And destroying the book, destroying my reputation, destroying everybody's trust was one of those typical things to do. And they would come in with, like, arguments, as I said, about how, Well, this book doesn't denounce Soviet social imperialism. I mean, really off-the-wall stuff, but at the time, people were taking those issues seriously, you know? And they would think about how do we answer this. It was very undermining.

There were other methods used. They would, for example, send phony letters, sign them from one leader in an organization to another leader accusing that person of something evil. And of course, it was not a real letter, but then the second person would retaliate. So, launching that sort of phony attack was another technique used, and then setting up competing organizations.

Also, some things happened. I think that, for example, the killing of Fred Hampton in Chicago, of the Panthers, was probably another COINTELPRO kind of action, because it just didn't make sense that the police just happened to wander in there that night and decide to kill him. To me, I think it was pretty clear it was a setup, and there were many, many actions like that, particularly against the Panthers, and against SNCC also in its last days, and also other groups. I mean, Native American groups had that experience, too. So it was pretty much any group that was carrying out any militant anti-capitalist or anti-imperialist action was likely to suffer an attack by COINTELPRO kinds of forces.

ROSS: Did this have a negative impact on your ability to organize people? Were they afraid?

12:50

MARTINEZ: Yeah. When I came to the Bay Area, it was new still, and it — that didn't happen for quite a while.

I think that there was another example of it that happened pretty soon back in New Mexico, which I had kept aware of there. OK. Two people, two young men in the Black Berets, which was a Chicano organization, were led to go to a construction site one night, with a view to stealing some dynamite. For what purpose, I don't know. But the police of Albuquerque had hired a Native American named Tim Chapa to infiltrate the Black Beret organization where these two young men were.

And so when they went to the construction site, the police were there in a stakeout. And their names were Antonio Cordova and Rito Canales. Anyway, the police hollered something at them. Antonio unfortunately turned around and fired at the police, which lead to the absolutely brutal assassination of both young men, and so many bullets found in each body that you couldn't count.

That action really did a lot to scare people off of organizing and supporting the work of the Black Berets, which was a pretty good community organization doing a whole lot of things, ideas they got from the Panthers, like the free breakfast program. And so those things had definitely died as a result of the publicity about that event, which portrayed, you know, any kind of activism movement work in a negative light. So I think that's an example, the example that comes to my mind the fastest. Yeah.

ROSS: So how were your gender politics treated as you moved to San Francisco? In other words, you were called a bourgeois feminist —

MARTINEZ: Yeah. (laughs) [But not in San Francisco].

ROSS: — but were you a feminist at all at the time?

MARTINEZ: I think so. I had really sort of become — well, feminist. It goes back to '68 in New York, where the mostly middle-class white groups were emerging, becoming very popular all over the country. And at that time I was still in New York, before going to New Mexico. And I went to the meetings of a group of radical feminists who contained some of the leadership that became quite well known later. And they were all white women, about ten, and they would meet in New York City and talk about issues as they saw them. And you know, complaining about the husbands who wouldn't wash the dishes, but more than that, also. They were more radical, really. They understood it was a system at work.

So the meetings were not bad, you know? So I went for several weeks. But then, one meeting was scheduled for the night of the day that Martin Luther King was assassinated in Tennessee. So I'm walking to

this meeting, like, my god, assuming that when I got to the meeting, we would at least talk for a while about that assassination. No! Nobody was interested in talking about it. I didn't believe it! So I just left, I never went back, because of the particularly, I thought, racial/racist focus of the group.

And so when I went to New Mexico, I had had that experience. I had friends who were white feminists who were a whole lot better than that, but I wouldn't say that I had a really good understanding yet. When I got to New Mexico (phone; break in tape)

I think the feminists and me had been cooking for a long time, because I remember, for example, when I was an editor at Simon & Schuster, which was, my goodness, in the '50s, into the early '60s? Yeah. I remember when I asked for a raise, and I was told, "Oh, you don't need a raise, you have a husband." Well, I'm an editor! I said, "What kind of shit is that?" Whatever. But I knew then something was wrong with that, and that was, you know, mid-'50s. I didn't fight it, though, and maybe that's the difference. I didn't fight it. I just — I don't know what I did.

But I knew there was something really wrong with this world in terms of, you know, the way women were treated. And so, if you had a husband, you didn't have to worry about — again, that was just one small example — which is why I went to those meetings in the first place in New York. And I think I always — my mother, by the way, my mother wasn't a declared feminist, but she was a very strong woman. She was a teacher; she ran her own life. One child was enough for her. And you know, she set an example, I think, for me of a strong woman who might not have been overtly feminist, but also she didn't take any you-know-what from my father (unclear).

ROSS: So how does gender politics express themselves when you moved to San Francisco?

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MARTINEZ: Well, I think that in a number of ways, I just — I don't know. I'm trying to remember any good examples, and I'm not sure I have a lot of examples. I know that in New Mexico already, I was — well, there's clear examples from New Mexico, just to back up a minute, when there was a young woman who was an activist in the land-grant movement, and I wanted her to go on behalf of the newspaper to a conference out of town to report on the conference for the newspaper. So I asked her to go; she was all excited. "Yeah, I'm gonna go." Well, her husband vetoed that: "Ugh, no, no, no." So I had a big argument with him about it. I mean, I had a real argument. And then another time, she called me from way out of town. She said, "I'm leaving him. Could you come and get me?" OK. So I got in the car, and I drove about 60 miles to pick her up and bring her out of that marriage. But when I got there, guess what? She had changed her mind. So all the contradictions that women go through, you know, they were right there. They were pretty clear. And so I saw both sides.

But the newspaper was essentially dependent on the work of women, and I was the editor, and there was another woman who was another major editor. We had one guy in there also for a while, but I think that for a lot of people, a lot of the women working there, this was a newspaper done mostly by women. And so we kind of stuck to that, you know? And I was very proud of it being mostly by women, and I trained some young women in journalism, kind of thing. So that was sort of some of the main ways.

Coming to the Bay Area, well, the Bay Area is already a little bit better than most places, in terms of the attitudes about sexism, about heterosexism, about, you know, the rights of gay and lesbians and transgender folks to be out there expressing themselves and living their way also. So I think I didn't have a lot of problems in San Francisco itself, so that when I came here looking for that dream organization that would provide the vision and the strategy and everything else to guide me and other people in our ongoing work, I picked this party, the Democratic Workers Party, because it was led by women. The head of it, the chair of it, was a woman. The second in charge was a woman. It was dominated by women's leadership. And I'm sure — I mean, that was kind of the major reason I chose it over other possibilities. So I think, you know, I was — yeah.

ROSS: Did that work out?

MARTINEZ: Well, good question. (laughs) It did and didn't. It did temporarily, in terms of the leadership being really brilliant — politically brilliant analysis and everything, and also critical of any kind of sexism within the organization. But unfortunately, the leader was also a tyrant, and maybe she became a tyrant by fighting to be a woman leader, I don't know. But the organization eventually self-destructed in 1985 because this top-down leadership was just too much for most of the members, including the women in it. And that's when I and other people left, in 1985.

So I'm afraid it's another case of being a woman doesn't prevent tyranny, (laughs) let's put it that way. It doesn't mean that everything is going to be, you know, on equal terms and so forth. It wasn't because she preferred men over women; it was just because that was her way of asserting her leadership. So leadership, you know, you do want women in leadership, and that's what I wanted, but it can't just be any woman. So that was kind of a major, major experience for me and other people. So that was '85.

ROSS: Before we go on —

MARTINEZ: Yes?

ROSS: — 1984 was Jesse Jackson's first run for the presidency.

MARTINEZ: Right.

ROSS: Did that have an impact on the work you were doing?

MARTINEZ: I think not much, because the party was still going on then, and I don't think so. We might well have supported that campaign.

ROSS: But you weren't involved in a local Rainbow Coalition?

MARTINEZ: No, no.

ROSS: OK. Just checking.

MARTINEZ: Yeah. No, it's a good question. I'd better look back. The one thing we did do which Jesse would've liked was that here in California, a law passed called Prop[osition] 13. Prop 13 said the taxes that were paid by homeowners should be lowered, and really, essentially, wiped out. I mean, really. And the result of that was the tax base of the state declined abruptly, sharply. Libraries had to close, clinics had to close. I mean, the services were just hit hard by Prop 13.

So our organization had the idea, What are we going to do? OK. We have to answer this in some way. And we got an initiative put on the ballot to tax the big corporations to make up for the cut in tax income for the state. And so the idea was — not the little corner stores, OK, no, but the big corporations, the big oil and other companies that were based here. And it was a brilliant idea, and it attracted so much support from working-class people, we suddenly had dozens and dozens of black grandmothers out there with us! (laughs) Because they knew it was — I mean, it's essentially a socialist concept, but put in very real and immediate, you know, kind of daily-life terms. So it almost passed. It came within about two points of passing in the state. So that was one of the really good things I think we did, and a lot of the leadership in it was women.

ROSS: That must have scared big business!

MARTINEZ: Oh, it did, yeah! It scared them, because it was so close. It scared them, and they attacked us a whole lot. So anyway.

ROSS: So, what else did you do in the late 1980s?

25:45

MARTINEZ: So, that was one of the better things that we did. We also developed an all-Latino chapter because the organization per se was dominated by women, but it was also white, very white. And it had a tiny handful of African American folks and Latinos. I wasn't very happy about that, and I tried to help get a little more color flowing.

So anyway, '85, the tyranny was just too much, and people started to speak out against it. When the secretary general was —

ROSS: What was her name?

MARTINEZ: Marlene Dixon. Marlene Dixon was — anyway. She was the secretary general, and she was unquestionably brilliant, I think, and from a working-class background. Her father worked in Hollywood, like setting up the props for a movie. Anyway, you know, they were not rich folks at all. So she had a good class sensitivity, and also very strong as a woman. But whatever. She did like things run her way only. And you used self-criticism, which was a popular practice of the time, especially among the party-building movement, but she used criticism, self-criticism, as a deadly weapon. I mean, you just could be massacred with words, with words of criticism.

So '85, it's all over, and people kind of split into two camps: one that just said everything was awful, there was nothing worthwhile done, forget it, goodbye; and the other, in which I was, said, Let's analyze what happened. Let's see how this goes down. Was there anything good about it, and why did we stay in it so long, if there was nothing good about it? So we tried to do that. But anyway. And I guess some of us are still trying.

So that was '85, and at that point, I was kind of flopping around, doing things in the Mission here, trying to help with this organization or that one. And —

ROSS: You're talking about the Mission District that we're in now?

MARTINEZ: Where we are now, right. The Mission District, which is mostly Latino, but there's a lot of other folks here: Asian, black, and always, the white folks, and it's become also the victim of the dot-com period, with a whole lot of — what's that word when you turn everything into a little shop?

ROSS: Gentrification?

MARTINEZ: Yeah, gentrification. Right, thanks. So I worked with some of those anti-gentrification people. I just sort of was all over the place. I also did a couple books then.

Well, 1997 is the first date I really remember after that. There must have been others, but that was the year that I was very troubled by the way that I felt that African American folks in California were being told their problem was all those Mexicans coming across the border. I did not think that was the only problem, and so we started doing kind of, you know, educational sessions about that, and I also — I was working with Speak Out, which is the Speakers Bureau. They would get me gigs to go talk at different places, which is how I paid the rent.

And one of the things we set up was a talking event that I did with Elena Featherston, an African American writer and lecturer. And we put together a whole show called Black and Brown, Get Down! And we

would go out there together, OK. She's black, and we would talk about how, Hey, you know what? We got a lot of things in common, so why aren't we fighting together instead of each other? I mean, and it was very popular in a whole lot of schools, really popular. And the only reason we couldn't do it as much as we'd like is because for a university to fly two people for an engagement was just kind of expensive, as opposed to just one, so, anyway.

But the idea of trying to build alliances between peoples of color in a state like California, which has a whole lot of them, right, and to oppose this divide-and-control number that was coming down became a very big concern of mine. And in 1997, Phil Hutchings — who was the last chair of SNCC, after Rap Brown and Stokely [Carmichael], Kwame Ture and the others — he had moved out here to the Bay Area by then, and he was my buddy, you know, and we talked about everything. And we got this idea: well, why don't we get a whole lot of people together and see what we can do? Maybe get all these different colors together and get them to build alliances and do something.

So we called a meeting. We invited 60 people, 60 activists, from all over the Bay Area. And guess what? All 60 came. Unheard of! Never before, and never since! To have all the people you invited to a meeting like that come. But they were there, and people were really excited about the idea. And we had a very good meeting, and out of that came another meeting. And then we set up the Institute for Multiracial Justice, which is kind of a tacky name, but anyway. The idea was, we were committed to building alliances between peoples of color. There was a lot of other good groups working with white folks, antiracists, and I worked with them also, challenging white supremacy groups that worked mostly with white activists. But we wanted to focus on peoples of color, because that's where so much division was going down.

So anyway, we started the Institute for Multiracial Justice, and put out a mission statement and started a program, started a newsletter called *Shades of Power*, which contained only articles about examples of alliance building between peoples of color: so, Chinese and Mexicans, you know, blacks and Arabs in Detroit, Japanese and more Mexicans — anyway, they were all stories in there. My favorite one was by a young Native American about relations with Chicanos. OK. At the time, it was sort of a cool thing for Chicanos and Chicanas to claim their Native heritage, right — part Indian, and all that. And they would start, you know, with all this paraphernalia because of that. So there was some criticism of that — very polite — by Native American folks. And my favorite article, which was written by Dennis Jennings, was about how he got a job once at the Walt Disney park down south, and his job actually was to drive the canoe like a good Indian, right, in the lake there.

ROSS: Dennis Banks from South Africa?

MARTINEZ: Oh, Dennis? No, no, no. No, no. Dennis Jennings.

ROSS: Oh, OK. (laughs)

MARTINEZ: Sorry. Yeah, Dennis Banks would have been cool, yeah. Anyway, so there was Dennis with his canoe. And he soon found out that most of the other supposedly Indian canoe operators were, in fact, Mexican. They were Chicanos. So he didn't like that at all. He was really pissed off about that. He said, "Why do they have this job? This is an Indian job!" (laughs) And so they were sort of glaring at each other and, you know, not getting along very well at all. Until one day. One day, a whole lot of white tourists came in and filled up — and they took all the boats, there were so many of them. And so guess what? The Chicanos and Dennis tipped the canoes so all the white tourists fell in the water. (laughs) Unity! Anyway, so that was Dennis's example of solidarity.

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So that was one of the more humorous articles, but we had others that were, you know, tougher and talking particularly about immigration as a force that was, you know, being used to cause division, and in some cases, causing lack of jobs that did result in resentment, duh-duh-duh. Anyway.

So that's why we did the Institute, and we had — let's see, we had four film and video festivals in the Mission, with examples of how people were doing the same kind of work, like African American folks in Brooklyn had a housing struggle going on, and then, you know, Asian American folks in San Francisco had the same kind of housing struggle going on. So the idea was the same: we have a lot of problems in common. And people didn't know those stories. They just did not know those stories at all, because the educational system does not like to teach us all the struggles we've had on the same side, and often against racism and then the imperialism.

And we also had several sort of forums where people would come together and talk about similar problems, or differences. The newsletter I thought was really good. Right now, by the way, we're putting together a collection of those newsletters, and [are going to] bring them out as a collection, as a book. So —

ROSS: *Shades of Power?*

MARTINEZ: *Shades of Power*. Yeah, I always liked that name, *Shades of Power*. It has certain implications, that word shades in there. Anyway. So yeah. Then came 9/11, right? Then came 9/11. Oh my god. OK. So we shifted a lot of the emphasis of our work then into antiwar effort, into educating people about how they were being dragged into a war that was not right, and also beginning to focus on a population that we hadn't given a lot of attention to before, which was the Arab, you know, and Islamic folks. So that was another dimension.

So that went on; 2001 — we're getting close here, huh? — 2002, 2005. Then came the Katrina Hurricane in New Orleans. And in the wake of that came the hiring of a whole lot of Latino workers by various

big corporations to go in there and do the cleanup, meanwhile ignoring the African American workers who had been there forever, right? And so there was a lot of resentment that was generated among the black workers towards all these Latino workers coming in, even though the Latino workers were being paid nothing, often just fired without getting their money, housed in trucks, in all kinds of horrible places. The food was — I mean, the conditions were terrible. But nevertheless, they had the work, in people's eyes.

So a group formed here, and we started putting together the idea of some effort being made in New Orleans that would set an example of bringing these two groups of workers together and fighting together for worker's rights, right, which I think has been sort of like the other dimension of the struggle for the rights of migrant workers, which — I like to use that expression better than immigrants, because they are migrant workers, right? That's what they are. They're migrating, looking for work. This struggle that exploded just this year in Congress, and then on the streets, I always felt — I mean, so we got very involved in that — that it was a case of being able to bring people together on two grounds, exploitation of workers and racism: that you could build black/brown unity on those two grounds if people could just see that's what they had in common.

So that's what we've been doing mostly since then, and there's a very good group in Oakland, which is the Black Alliance for Just Immigration, BAJI. They call themselves BAJI. They have focused particularly on Africans, African immigrants and African American immigrants, Caribbean and so on. But they also have been helpful and working together on building this unity, this solidarity we're talking about.

So that's the main thing I've been doing now, and you know, it's funny. In a way, it's sort of like all these years added up to this, because going way back to when I was one of the two Latinas working full-time with SNCC — two: me and Maria Varela — I mean, that's kind of what I was trying to do then, and here I am, (laughs) you know, what, 50 years later, still barking up that tree and saying, Let's get it together, and we can do something to this system! And I still believe that. I still believe if we're ever going to really have the power and build a movement strong enough to transform this society into one of justice with peace, a large part of that will happen as a result of different forces coming together, seeing what they have to fight for in common, and really getting out there and using everything they can — nonviolently, of course — to change this society.

So, I still believe in that after all these years. I still believe in the power of that. And I'm not leaving out Asian folks. They're crucial to this also. I'm not leaving out the Arab/Islamic folks, because they're really — the white folks, the Native Americans, you know, and Pacific Islanders, they all have to be brought together. But I'm just saying, the particular focus of our efforts, along with some Chinese friends, has

been on the black/brown unity as a major part of that alliance building that I hope can turn things upside down.

ROSS: Do you think the whole concept of re-promoting white supremacy has an impact on your work? Because we seem to be returning to an earlier, more nativist culture that's reminiscent of the 1920s.

40:46

MARTINEZ: You couldn't be more right. It's just — yeah, the 1920s or earlier. It's kind of horrendous, the statements that are being made, what's being put out there, the books that are being written saying, Oh, these immigrants are going to completely change our American culture and society and values, and everything like that. And in the name of patriotism, also. I mean, that's the label put on it for political reasons. It's pretty unspeakable, and indeed, white supremacy, which has never died, is reviving with a bang, or they're trying to revive it with a bang, and I think all of the attacks on the immigrants, the migrant workers, have a strong, strong element of that attack. And that's another reason I think that we could work with other people who experience the blows of white supremacy, and there's a whole lot of people who do.

ROSS: Now, I want to explore something that as an African American I seem to observe, and that is as new migrant workers come into our economy, as they assimilate, they seem to embrace some of the tenets of racism and white supremacy in their effort to fit in. Is this a phenomenon that I'm just sensitive to, or —

MARTINEZ: No, no.

ROSS: — does it really exist?

MARTINEZ: No, I think it happens. Sometimes, they even come with already racist attitudes towards black folks from the countries they come from, and that's — I mean, it isn't so that they're born to these attitudes when they get here, and I think that's particularly true with Latinos. They're right next door, you know, to the United States, which has been exporting its attitudes forever, its racism, its white supremacy, forever. And there's just a whole lot of examples of that.

First of all — so people do come here often with those attitudes, OK? And you have already a tension in Mexico, which has a large Afro-Mexican population and history — most of the original settlers around the two coasts: the west coast, Costa Chica, that whole area; and the east coast, around Veracruz. So, and they have been the subject of a lot more attention recently, and I think that there's more understanding about that. And I'm hoping that people in Mexico are waking up to the fact that although they say, Oh, we're all Mexicans, but you know, there's a few special kinds, and one special kind is Afro-Mexican, and the other one is just plain Native people, indigenous people, as in Chiapas.

So anyway, I think these — sometimes, they come with those attitudes already, and I think, you know, the heavy-duty white supremacist brainwashing, shall we say, comes, of course, when they're here. And I think you're right. I mean, too many Latin Americans, and Mexican Americans in particular, end up supporting the Republican Party, which to me is just unbelievable. You know, how they could do that? But you find them, and they're not the majority by any means, thank goodness. They're not the majority. The majority — well, for what it's worth, right, the majority vote Democratic, or Raza Unida Party at one time. So —

ROSS: But an increasing number did vote Republican in the last election — enough to actually tip that election. What do you think that's attributed to?

MARTINEZ: I don't think that tipped the election. I think what tipped the election was just plain fraud, you know?

ROSS: Well, they did steal it.

MARTINEZ: In Ohio or — yeah, and other places. So, anyway.

I think that there's definitely a pattern that a lot of people go through, which is they get here, they fight for survival, they eat dirt, they live very hard lives; if they survive and eventually get more settled, maybe they even buy a little house somewhere, by the second or third generation, the openness to backward ideas is there. Other people, they don't, and they never will, and they often come out of an organizing tradition in their home countries that's very radical, particularly labor organizing. So I think that the marches that took place in April and May 1st, that was a total of about five million people, overwhelmingly Latinos in a hundred cities.

ROSS: What do you think that means?

MARTINEZ: What?

ROSS: What do you think is the significance of those marches?

MARTINEZ: Well, it was a reaction most specifically to the Sensenbrenner Bill which passed the House, declaring people without papers, so-called illegal immigrants, declaring them felons, criminals. Criminals! Not just some little rinky-dink, you know, bureaucratic violation, but criminals. And anybody who helped them was a criminal, which a lot of the churches who had been helping them and always will really rose up against that. So you could lock up some priest for giving an immigrant, you know, a sandwich.

So that was an immediate — the indignity of being categorized, called a criminal because all you'd done is come here to try to survive

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and help your family survive, this was just enraging. It was not new, completely, because there had been a lot of work being done up to that time. So I think that probably, the degree to which the ideas had been cooking up to then was not quite understood, because suddenly, without any organization to speak of except, you know, the DJs on the line saying, Get out there! Demonstrate! March! And it was largely a DJ — a Spanish DJ effort. People were out in the streets, pushing their little baby carriages — everybody, and just saying no.

And I think that the ferocity of that response — and I say ferocity — is a good sign, because [although] it does not say they have come to understand that they are being treated in racist ways, and so they should fight white supremacy and racism, but it's the beginning of that, I hope. And I just hope that the organizers can keep pushing that as an understanding of why the attacks upon immigrants are happening, because it's racism. It really is. It's not just illegal status.

ROSS: Well, I seemed to witness a moment where our political organizations were running double-time to catch up to the movement.

MARTINEZ: Yeah.

ROSS: Because the movement happened from an upsurge from the ground. It was —

MARTINEZ: Right.

ROSS: — not something coordinated —

MARTINEZ: No. It was spontaneous.

ROSS: — by our organizations.

MARTINEZ: Spontaneous and bottom-up, yeah. Yeah.

ROSS: And that really was a sublime moment.

MARTINEZ: Right.

ROSS: That's what made it special. At least as I —

MARTINEZ: Yeah.

ROSS: — witnessed and participated in it.

MARTINEZ: No, I think you're right about it. And Atlanta had a whole lot of people out in the streets, too.

ROSS: Absolutely.

MARTINEZ: Yeah.

ROSS: Absolutely.

MARTINEZ: And I remember when I was at the university, there on my last trip, Atlanta University, right, I know one of the things I was hearing about was resentment in rural areas against Latino workers who were coming in there. So OK, here's another area where we — you know? But then came the demonstration in Atlanta. So there's ups and downs all over the place.

ROSS: Absolutely.

MARTINEZ: And I think we've got to be doing what we can do to keep the ups from getting to be downs.

ROSS: Now, I do want to know more about other work that you're doing, that you're engaged in, because you seem to be a woman of many interests. I don't think anybody could never define you as one-dimensional. So, what are some of the other projects you've got going on?

MARTINEZ: OK. I'm doing this book, *Five Hundred Years of Chicana Women's History*.

ROSS: *Women's* history now?

MARTINEZ: Women only. Women's.

ROSS: Good!

MARTINEZ: The first book was *Five Hundred Years of Chicano History*, which is men and women. And we made sure there was a lot of women in that book, but this book is *only* women. Only. And I mean, I'm just stunned sometimes at the number of women I found that people know nothing about — nothing! — and what they did. It's just amazing. And finding pictures of them: not easy. That's why it's taken five years, and the first book took only one year.

ROSS: Where are you in that project?

MARTINEZ: Where am I in the project? I'm glad to say I'm in the 1980s, early '90s. But there's a whole lot happening since then. So that's going on. It's a pictorial history. It's pictures with small amounts of text. They're bilingual: Spanish and English book. And I'm hoping that a middle school student can read it, so you know, it's not all fancy-pantsy language, and that I'm making sure that this translation is not so obscure Spanish. And I'm very excited about it. And so, it'll be done this year.

ROSS: Well, capturing and documenting history seems to be a passion of yours. Where does that come from?

MARTINEZ: Yeah. Well, that's a good question, because I did do a book — you know, at Simon & Schuster, I did a book I'm very proud of, actually, in 1963, called *The Movement*. It was a photographic book about the civil rights movement. It was a beautiful book. I mean, everybody was in it, and Lorraine Hansberry wrote the text for it. So this is way back. And so, that was kind of the first time I did something like that, and I've been kind of plugging away. I guess it's just the idea that pictures with a certain number of words to go with them can educate people in a good way, and can move them forward and maybe even inspire them.

And I get sort of an enormous charge out of hearing stories from teachers. I ran into a teacher somewhere. "Oh! You did *Five Hundred Years of Chicano History*, didn't you?" "Yes, ma'am." And then she said, "Well, I just have to tell you. I had this student in my class, he was a Mexican kid, and he was about to drop out of class. I mean, he just didn't like school no more. And I showed him your book. I said, 'Look, look at that.' He never dropped out. He went on to graduate school." I mean, stories like that — wow! And they come frequently, all the time. I mean, I ran into somebody the other day who, I think he's a lawyer now or something. He said, "Oh, yeah. I got your book. I stole it from the library in El Paso, Texas." (laughs) "You stole it?" "Yeah, I know I shouldn't have stole it, I know. But I just had to have that book!" (laughs) Stories like that. And it changed my life.

So anyway, I guess I see that possibility. And I don't make movies, or even — well, yeah, I did make a video out of the *Five Hundred Years* book, which is in English, and I did it again in Spanish. I mean, it's much more direct. You can look at that video for one hour and get a whole lot, which is less time than it takes to look at a book. But I just believe in doing both. One backs up the other.

And so, you know, I realize that I am sort of in that mode, but I also just plain write. And I'm writing an article right now about the Mexican election — oh my god! So I write a lot of kind of more or less journalism about current events.

ROSS: Well, what's your opinion of Obrador —

MARTINEZ: Oh, well.

ROSS: — and the election?

MARTINEZ: That election and what's happening afterwards has put this country to shame, calling itself a democracy, OK? So they cheat the election in Florida to get Bush to win it. Do you think that Al Gore says anything? No protest, nobody in the streets. It goes to the Supreme Court and he said OK. And the Supreme Court rules Bush in. So then that's 2000 —

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2004, same thing. All of these charges of fraud in Ohio, just one state, and where is John Kerry? Is he complaining? No.

Mexico has a law — I mean, Mexican constitutional law and laws related to the election are much more severe than in this country. Because they've been through so much fraud, so they're much more severe. So that when it was announced that Calderón, the conservative candidate, had won, it wasn't official yet at all. That body, OK, the electoral committee, has no right to declare a candidate a victor. It doesn't do that. It just supervises the election, reports on the election, and then the tribunal, which is a court, announces the victory, and has to announce the victor by September 7th. So all these reports that, Oh, well, he was elected, duh-duh-duh-duh — not true. He was never officially elected, Calderón.

On top of which, what did the *Washington Post* say about all this? It compared López Obrador to Josef Stalin, literally, in print, saying that he had used Stalin's methods of terrorizing the population in order to get in power. Huh? What? And the *New York Times* editorial was not much better. It accused him of gross, grave irresponsibility. The man is demanding a count of the vote to prove who won, since even with the first election commission, it was still only at 0.5 percent, less than 0.6 percent — less than 1 percent. I mean, it doesn't take a whole lot of cheating to do that.

ROSS: I understand they used the Diebold voting machines, too, that we exported quite a few of our own —

MARTINEZ: Yeah.

ROSS: — faulty technology —

MARTINEZ: Absolutely!

ROSS: — down there.

MARTINEZ: Absolutely! All over the place. And so they turned in eight hundred pages — Obrador turned in eight hundred pages — of supposed proof of fraudulent practices all over the country, and particularly in — the northern half of Mexico is strongest in terms of the PAN [National Action Party], the [party of] Calderón; the southern half of Mexico is much stronger in terms of Obrador. And it's not surprising; it's poorer there. So whenever there was an area where it was PAN-controlled, well, somehow the votes just sort of — extra [votes] rolled in. So, and there were not observers in every — according to law, there's supposed to be observers, neutral observers, at every polling station. There were none. And especially they were not in the PAN-controlled area. I mean, the evidence is so likely to add up to a different result.

And so López Obrador, he is using what the Constitution says you can do. You can demand a recount, and that's what he's done. And then,

of course, to back up his demand, he's got a couple of million people (laughs) downtown camping out on the main plaza, disrupting everything. But it *is* non-violent. It's just people in the plaza. So that doesn't make him into Stalin, I don't think.

Anyway, so I don't think López Obrador is any raging radical. I mean, his politics are not super radical. I think he's probably a populist, more accurately described, but he certainly is leaning to the left, and he's certainly, I think, a better — [he] would take more steps to end the poverty and so forth in Mexico than Calderón would. And on top of everything, Calderón is from the same party as the sitting president, so.

ROSS: Is that the PAN?

MARTINEZ: Yeah. So. Anyway, it's exciting.

ROSS: It *is* exciting.

MARTINEZ: Yeah! (laughs)

ROSS: What do you think about the attacks being launched against Hugo Chávez?

MARTINEZ: Uh! I was there, OK? I went there with a group of people from many other countries for what was called An Open Dialogue About — something Justice and Peace, I think. And we were there about a week or ten days. We got to see a lot of the country, got to talk to a lot of people. And there's just no way that I can think — and we had three meetings with Hugo Chávez — big meetings, but still. And we got to ask him questions individually.

So, there's microphones in two aisles, right, in this big, big, room. And I looked at the microphone and said, There's nothing but men — men, men, men! — asking questions. I said, I've got to do something about this. So I marched up to the microphone (laughs) — I'm the one woman! And other women came later. Anyway. So I said, "Mr. President" — in Spanish. I don't exactly remember what I said, but I essentially said that we're very glad to have this opportunity to see Venezuela and to see what's really going on here, and I just want you to know I'm making a personal commitment to try to counter the attacks on the new Bolivarian revolution being conducted here in a different way, and tell some of the truth about it.

Well, you know what? This meeting went on for like, two hours. An hour later, he referred to what I said. That dude has a memory. I mean, I realize it was flattering, but still, he has a memory. And he's awfully smart. Awfully smart.

ROSS: Well, that's quite a difference than the president that we have.

58:25

MARTINEZ:            Indeed! Really! He can't remember anything! No. So I have a very positive attitude. There's only one thing he's done that I don't understand why he's done it, and that was to support the opposition candidate in the Peruvian election. And he really threw his weight behind him. But I mean, that was kind of meddling in another country's election, which isn't the kind of thing he usually does. I don't know why he did that, and I'm waiting to hear somebody's explanation for that.

ROSS:                I don't even know *if* he did it, because you can't believe what you read in the newspaper!

MARTINEZ:           That's true. That's absolutely true. Yeah, exactly.

ROSS:                What do you think about the illness of Fidel Castro and the way the United States –

MARTINEZ:           Oh, yeah.

ROSS:                – is poised to basically take over that country?

MARTINEZ:           You know, I don't know, except that the United States, which has an agency working for ten years to draw up a plan for what to do after the passing of Fidel — I mean, there's an article in the [*San Francisco Chronicle*] about it yesterday. And I don't know what's in that plan, but I can imagine. I mean, I see no way — and I could be completely wrong — that anybody is going to make a drastic change in the nature of that society. I don't think anybody is going to suddenly raise the rents, charge for education, no free health care. I don't see that happening.

I mean, the blockade has been a really bad thing for Cuba, the U.S. blockade. And it's had a lot of problems surviving economically, and it's not in good shape now. Too many people go to university and then they can't get a job. So it's not good, and the dollar is becoming awfully preeminent, shall we say, in Cuba. So there's problems. But I can't see that a Bush-approved administration would make that any better. I don't know. Nor would those Cubans in Miami, the older generation, make it any better.

So Raul Castro is said to be — and who knows? — somewhat more reformist in the sense of more economic — what do you call it? — free enterprise. Well, they were already allowing a lot of that. I don't know. But he's not as charismatic — OK, I'm not going to cry over that — as Fidel. But I don't think there's any way in which things like his lack of charisma are going to make the people turn against that society. And I assume there will be some who might see it as an opening — young people, maybe? I don't know.

I don't know whether Fidel is seriously ill, which this may be all a mask for that. I hope not, because when I was there 20 years ago — I mean, I made seven trips to Cuba, and I wrote a book about Cuba called

*The Youngest Revolution*, which is a really nice little book, because it looked at the three contradictions I saw there, which is race, class, and gender. And I was right. Anyway. (laughs) So when I went to work with a bunch of young women in a labor camp planting citrus trees, there was

—

ROSS: Well, we're going to —

MARTINEZ: — a foreman there, and he —

ROSS: — stop right here.

MARTINEZ: What?

ROSS: We're going to stop right here.

MARTINEZ: We have to! I'm going backwards.

ROSS: Well, no. I'm going to re-ask you the Cuba question. We just only have one minute left on this tape —

MARTINEZ: Oh, OK.

ROSS: — and I want to change tapes, OK?

MARTINEZ: Right, OK.

1:03:21

END TAPE 2

## TAPE 3

ROSS: So Betita, why don't we start now looking at your personal life once you moved to the Bay Area. What was going on with you personally? Were you still married? What was going on?

MARTINEZ: After I came to the Bay Area? I was completely unattached, detached, and otherwise. There was no partner, there was no other special person, there was nada. Because I moved here in '76, right? And the last relationship I had with anybody was when? — was in New Mexico in oh, let's see, I guess '70-what? I don't remember. That's a good question. I've got to think a bit. Well, anyway, it was in the '70s, and it was —

ROSS: Hans Koning?

MARTINEZ: No, no. Hans was — Hans is actually a good friend of mine now. We keep in touch a lot, because he's a writer, and he's my daughter's father, you know, so we share a lot of stuff about getting published, or what are you writing and how can I help you. And I'm trying right now to get a book of his published by just sending off an outline to some friends. Anyway.

So no, but in New Mexico, what was it, '68 to '73, OK? In the early '70s, I had a relationship with this guy who came to work for *El Grito del Norte*, and his name was Rees — R-E-E-S — Lloyd — L-L-O-Y-D. And he was actually originally a sort of star reporter for the main daily newspaper of New Mexico, which was the *Albuquerque Journal*. He's a really good reporter. And so then he quit that job and came up north to work on *El Grito del Norte*, which is kind of interesting.

He was the son of East Chicago, Indiana, iron — or steel; it was steel that was there, I think. Steel. And so he came out of that sort of very working-class background in steel. White guy, but he was also proud of his Welsh heritage from the Lloyd side, and very anti-everything — anti-establishment, anti-everything. And so we got along very well, and I liked his work on the paper. It was good. We got along fine. We lived together.

And then what happened? Oh! When I went to Cuba in 1970, yeah, 1970, and we went to Cuba together, actually, and then he stayed — oh, I know what happened! While we were in Cuba, we got word by a telephone call that our former reporter and dear friend, Antonio Cordova, had been shot to death by the Albuquerque Police Department, along with another Black Beret member, Rito Canales, and it was a setup. They'd been set up by an agent who had infiltrated the Black Beret organization, which I mentioned before. It was a time of discouragement and fear.

So we got the word, and I had to get right back, OK? So I jumped on the next plane back from Cuba, and he stayed another week in Cuba. And he had an affair with a wonderful, wonderful young African

woman, naturally, whose name I almost remember. Anyway. So then he sort of came limping back, limping (laughs) back to New Mexico. Oh, well. So that was kind of the beginning of the decline in the relationship. So it wasn't — you know, not really surprising. The guy had been — I mean, he's a very, very good-looking guy; had a million girlfriends all over the place, so.

But then he got involved with a young woman working with *El Grito*, and they spent many hours in the darkroom together doing photographic work, supposedly. (laughs) Anyway, you get the picture. So she got pregnant by him. I don't even remember what happened. But in any case, that was kind of the end of that. Then, yeah, he moved out and got involved with some Native American woman (laughs), and eventually went somewhere else, and ended up in LA as a lawyer. And we kind of lost touch after that, a lot. But I mean, I was very fond of him, you know? But it just, shall we say, didn't work out, as they say. There was too many other fish to fry, or one of those things (laughs) — fish to fry.

ROSS: Fish in the sea?

MARTINEZ: Fish in the sea, thank you. That's better. Thanks.

So then, you know, so that was that. And then I moved out here. And so that was like '72. Then I moved out here in '76, and there was nothing in between, and nothing after I got here. So I've been all just me for years here, first in Oakland, and then in San Francisco, and just work-work-work-work-work. And I mean, I wasn't *opposed* to anybody or anything. It just didn't happen. And I think sometimes — I don't know. Sometimes I think that I would really rather have some kind of partner, you know, we could do more together. But it hasn't happened.

So that's kind of the end of that story. I did have a wonderful dog, whose picture is all over the place here. That's a wonderful dog. I had that dog for 15 years, and boy, that was my buddy. So I don't know. It's another one of those stories about women who end up with a dog they love and that's about it. (laughs) I have a lot of friends, and a lot of wonderful people I work with, so.

ROSS: Well, tell me about raising your daughter.

MARTINEZ: Oh, my daughter? OK. Well, that's — yeah, OK. I did not do a good job with that — at all. I mean, I really neglected her for the movement. I tried not to, but I did anyway. And I mean, I would take her places with me and everything. It wasn't probably so bad in the first years.

Oh, wait, no — but there was another guy in there. Oh, who was that? I have — my years are confused. There was another guy in there I lived with for a while who actually was a heroin addict, and he had to go. But he was a poet; he was a wonderful poet, so. Those were the years in the '50s, of the so-called Beat Generation, and because of Howard, this poet friend, I got to know all those people — Allen

Ginsberg and Gregory Corso, and duh-duh-duh-duh-duh, all on the Lower East Side. And yeah, so I really had my years of the Beat Generation, and that's because of Howard. And Howard knew painters, so I had a whole cultural something-or-other then. But I also thought that — you know, I thought there was quite a bit of rebelliousness also in that generation.

Anyway, and I was — I guess that's when I was working at Simon & Schuster. So, but then Howard had to go, because he — I mean, there was a day when he was desperate to get out of the house, he'd get up to Harlem and get his dope, and I just was sick of it, and I got out. And I stood in front of the car, and I said, "No, please don't." And he started to drive away anyway. And I thought, "He's ready to kill me, he wants his dope so bad. I think this is not going to continue well."

So anyway. So yeah. And he tried to teach me to do things; it just never took. (laughs) I tried marijuana but I just coughed all the time. (laughs) Anyway, I was not a successful addict of that sort. So there was Howard, yeah. But then, it was an important period in my life, you know, because of all the contacts and the people that I got to know through him him, people who went on to do some good stuff. So anyway, that was Howard. And —

ROSS: So why do you think you did a bad job with your daughter? Because she seems to be very successful right now.

MARTINEZ: Oh, well, yeah. Well, because — I mean, when we were living — she and I and Howard lived together for a while way up near Harlem in New York City. I did not know until very recently — this is what, like 50 years later or something — no, 40 years. I did not know that he used to really, like, treat her badly, OK? She didn't tell me that until much later. And I don't know; he didn't exactly beat her up, but something just short of that. He abused her physically. I don't mean sexually, but physically. I did not know that. And why didn't I know that? I don't know. She didn't feel able to tell me.

So after that, then, as of '62, '63, when I got all involved with SNCC, that's when the neglect really started, because I was just totally into this movement.

ROSS: What year was Tessa born?

10:37
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MARTINEZ: She was born in —

ROSS: What's her birth date?

MARTINEZ: Fifty-four. February 8th. She's 52 now, and — yeah. So those years of being in the movement continued out here in the Democratic Workers Party. I was not giving her the love and attention I should have.

And then at one time, I did something kind of unbelievable, which was that she was one year old, a baby — and that was when I was

married. Hans and I were living together. And I can not believe what I did. What I did was he talked me into parking Tessa, who was a little baby, with his mother in Amsterdam for a few months while we went around. So I put her on the — I didn't even take her there. I put her on — Tessa — on the plane with a cousin to fly to Amsterdam, where she then found that Hans's mother was not, in fact, going to take care of her directly, but was going to put her in a very, very, very classy place for the children of diplomats.

So I let her stay there for about — oh, it must have been six, eight months. And she's never forgotten that, that I parked her with a — first with a cousin, and then in this place. So, she every now and then reminds me of that as the reason why she's very insecure, OK? So, anyway. So that's the thing I'm most ashamed of, why I don't like to talk about my personal stuff. That was really —

So then the party years came after that, you see, and it was still more of the same. I tried to get her into the party, and — for a couple of months. Then she did some theater work, because she was interested in theater. Worked with them, but it didn't last. And she didn't like the discipline, which I don't blame her.

Anyway, then the party ended in '85, and I finally — '85, like that's yesterday, right? Ten years ago. I finally made a very conscious effort to try to make up for the past and do more with her, and everything like that. But naturally — I mean, she'd sometimes go along with it, but I think a lot of the time, she was just suspicious and distrustful and all those things.

So I really — she didn't talk to me a lot about what was going on with her. Every now and then, something would burst out. But she never married. She was interested in this really, really nice guy from Mexico. He came up here to meet her mother, and my mother, and brought nice gifts and all that. But I don't know what happened. She just didn't go back to live with him in Mexico, you know? He was also in theater.

So she went along, and she didn't get attached to nobody. And so finally, eight years ago, she started living with David just a few blocks from here. David was kind of cool. He was a musician who also did carpentry work, who also was political. Anyway. I liked David a lot, and they stayed together for eight years. But then she decided David had to go. David was lacking in something that she needed. I don't know: something, some more expressive emotional something-or-other. So she told David to get out.

Anyway. So David moved out. And so, this was like less than a month ago. And so she's been alone in the house since then, and I mean, she's been doing theater work off and on, OK, and translation jobs at the hospital, English-Spanish, to pay the rent whenever there wasn't any. Theater work in this town is ridiculous. It is like almost — so little of it, so hard to do. There's like five people who could do theater work full time and expect to live from it.

And so anyway, what she's doing right now is more like directing, which she really loves, to direct, even more than acting itself. Right

now, she's directing her second group of teenagers in an abbreviated production of *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare. And before that, she worked with another group of teenagers — mostly Latino kids who didn't speak that much English — they were from 11 to 14 — in *Romeo and Juliet*. *Romeo and Juliet* is a smash hit (break in tape) because of the two families, the Capulets — they were almost like gangs, right? So, and there's this woman in between. They love it! They love it. They love to pronounce the Shakespeare right, correctly. No, don't tell me, just tell me how to say that exactly. "Rrrroomeo, Rrrromeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?" Anyway (laughs), they go for it! I mean, they just love it. It's a whole discovery for me, that you can use theater, the right kind of play with kids, like teenagers, and do wonderful things. And she said, "All these kids are great. They're all smart; they're all wonderful. They really put their hearts into it." I mean, she just raves about them.

So anyway, I don't know. That's the end; that job ends this coming week. I don't know what she'll do after that. I mean, I pay her bills now and then, which she lets me do, asks me sometimes. But anyway, I once told her, I said, "Tessa, why don't you just go get a baby somewhere, and I'll help you take care of it." "You'll help me? Ha ha!" Now, I don't blame her for saying that. But it was an idea.

ROSS:

Well, what in raising her did you do differently than your mother did in raising you?

17:20

MARTINEZ:

Oh, I don't know. That's a good question. My mother was a teacher. She taught full time, in the morning until about four in the afternoon, she'd come home. My father was also a teacher. And I think — you know, it's interesting. My mother was not that, quote, heavily a mother, compared to some other women, but she certainly never would have parked me somewhere, or put me in somebody else's — airplane to go somewhere. I mean, she just wouldn't have done that kind of thing. She was always there, always there, and always had a strong sense of fairness and, you know, this and that; tried to have parties where — but see — well, it was a very racist neighborhood we lived in, and so she sort of had to arrange parties where a few kids would come, because the neighbors' kids weren't about to come. So, and she was very aware of that, and we didn't talk about it a lot.

So I just remember she tried to arrange parties, like two or three parties a year, to have other kids come. She didn't talk about it, but I know that she was aware of the problem, and the fact that the little girl next door was not allowed to play with me because I was Mexican. She was white herself, but she became completely Mexicanized in her interest [in the] language, and teaching work.

So anyway, I mean, I can't remember any time when ever I felt that what she was doing was more important to her than what I needed or was doing. I just don't have any recollection like that at all — at all, at all. I can't think of anything.

ROSS: But with Tessa, what did you do differently?

MARTINEZ: What did I do differently with Tessa? Well, I just wasn't there that much, at least — let me think. You know, I don't remember specific periods where — well, I probably don't want to. Hah! But I know like, summertime — OK. Summertime, I went with my parents like almost every day — and they were both tennis players — to play tennis in some little rinky-dinky club where it was not fancy at all, but we'd go and play tennis together, the three of us. I never did anything like that with Tessa. And she would go off with some friend and do stuff with her friends. She was left on her own in that way, and I don't know how much I might have tried to do something differently. I just don't know. Better to ask her.

And in fact, somebody's going to ask her. There's a movie in the making by Sylvia Morales. Sylvia Morales is a Los Angeles filmmaker who, when she was a student at UCLA, film student, she decided to turn a slideshow of Chicana history — it was the only thing ever done, by a very well-known Chicana feminist — to turn that into a documentary. And she did it, [as an] undergraduate. It was the first movie ever made about Chicana history, going back, you know, before Cortez and everything. And so, I mean, it was just kind of stunning that anybody ever made something.

So now, that was one of the — boy, '60s, maybe early '70s. She is now doing a follow-up movie talking to some of the women she knew then, like me, and their children, and talking about that relationship. So she was here two days ago to sort of start planning the movie, and she also met with Tessa out there, at that table. And so we'll see what comes of that. I hope something revealing, you know? Because I mean, Tessa and I have gone to a number of joint sessions with a therapist. It was really good. And the therapist basically said, "Look, when she yells at you or gives you a — just let it float by. Just don't respond. Don't answer. Just, you know, let her say whatever she wants to say." So that's what I try to do.

ROSS: Well, what —

MARTINEZ: I try not to argue with her.

22:05

ROSS: One thing that I always remind myself is that the struggle is perfect, so I don't have to be.

MARTINEZ: (laughs) That's a great saying! Oh, I'm going to remember that. Write it down!

ROSS: (laughs) No, really. Because we strive to be all these things as women that are impossible to be all simultaneously!

MARTINEZ: And easily.

ROSS: And so, I just take a lot of comfort out of the fact that first of all, our children grow up despite us, and the struggle is perfect, so I don't have to be.

MARTINEZ: (laughs) That's a great saying.

ROSS: But in terms of other parts of your life? Your social life; I've asked you about your romantic involvements, and you've basically said they ended.

MARTINEZ: I've gone thorough all those romances, yes.

ROSS: And so what else keeps you vibrant and going other than political work?

MARTINEZ: Yeah. Well, you know, it's true. My parents had me take piano, and I did a recital and everything. And after that, I didn't play the piano again. My mother had perfect pitch. You could tell her to sing a song, and she'd play it. Then I also had dance lessons, and so I had a recital. But I didn't do much of that either after that, dance lessons.

So what on earth was it I was thinking of? I guess most of what I've done — which involves movies, because I was a movie critic at one time, officially, way back. I wrote reviews for magazines. I like movies; I always liked movies, all kinds of movies. So I guess, you know, images and words have been the sort of areas where I've sort of been most active, and you know, they don't add up to a lot of — whatever — creative — well, some of it is creative, yeah. Some of it's creative. But I think I don't have any sort of like — and you know, like I really like being near the earth. I really like the garden part. I can't say I do a lot of gardening, but I get out there and mess around some. So yeah. And animals.

ROSS: You and your favorite *perro*, your favorite dog.

MARTINEZ: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

ROSS: In terms of legacy and things that you'd like to be remembered for having done, what are some of those?

MARTINEZ: That's the question. That's usually the last question.

ROSS: It's not going to be, but. (laughs)

MARTINEZ: Oh no? Oh, well.

ROSS: I just wanted you to —

MARTINEZ: I had hopes.

ROSS: – reflect on your life.

MARTINEZ: I had hopes. I had hopes. Maybe it's sort of a combination of a couple of things, maybe. That maybe I have, in some area of this country — probably mostly the Southwest, mostly; this is the Bay Area, but some other places, too — Texas — that maybe I have, kind of just by lasting as long as I lasted, made people feel like, oh, they can keep going, too — which is not an answer I would have given you 20 years ago, probably. But I think maybe that's it.

And the second thing is just, I guess really I do like to think whatever contribution I may have made to young people to want to improve their lives, improve the world, improve this society, just really be fully alive, is the way I would put it. And insofar as any of my work, the books or whatever, helped that to happen, it makes me feel like maybe that's a contribution that I should look at in some way. So I guess that would —

ROSS: Well, I would say that your writing *Four Hundred and Fifty* and then *Five Hundred Years of Chicano History* was history making! (laughter)

MARTINEZ: Yes!

ROSS: As will be that thing. And when they say, Betita Martinez? Yes, she wrote that book that really did change how people saw themselves in the world.

MARTINEZ: Yeah. I hope so. I hope it did, at least some folks. Yeah.

ROSS: I think so.

MARTINEZ: Yeah, I think so.

ROSS: Now, in terms of your work that you do with the Institute —

MARTINEZ: Yeah?

ROSS: As well as other leadership positions that you're engaged in now, where do you see that going in the future?

MARTINEZ: I think it's so hard to answer that question at this time, in this country. That's the number one answer: it is really hard. Because things are just, I think, so bad. I haven't seen this country so much in the grip of neofascist state in my whole lifetime. Even in the '50s, with the McCarthy period, it wasn't this bad. I mean, the grip was not that consolidated. McCarthyism was there, but it didn't dominate most people's lives and the whole government. It was bad enough. And it

even made some people commit suicide, which hasn't happened that much yet now, but anyway.

I just think that what's happening right now, inspired by the Republican right and the Bush definition of family values and all other values, is so devastating and so negative and so really scary. And I keep waiting: where is the reaction? Where is the revolt? Where is the, you know, the democracy? And where is all these things? And so, I don't know where it's all going to go. But I'll tell you, that's one reason I'm going to stay around. (laughs)

ROSS: Well, why do you think people *aren't* responding now?

MARTINEZ: It's almost impossible to answer that question. I wrote an article a while ago which sort of answers that question a little bit, maybe it tries to, called "The Immaculate Dictatorship." No offense to Catholics, OK? But I used the term immaculate because most governments — backward, reactionary governments — have to stay in power with considerable bloodletting. This country has not had to kill thousands or millions of people who are protesting. It's killed hundreds, but not thousands. I mean —

ROSS: Well, they haven't had to kill them in this country. They kill them in others.

MARTINEZ: They kill them in others, that's right. But I mean, that's what I'm talking about, this place right here.

29:46
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But I think the dictatorship then maintains itself with various other means than just plain domestic repression, and I think one of those is educational and cultural domination, of imperialist, white supremacist, values and ideas, which are then backed up by the existence of a few institutions like the Congress — like, you know, you can appeal to the courts or something — those things are there to make people feel like, Well, it isn't *really* a dictatorship. And people can appeal to those elements or those institutions, but they don't change anything basic. They just don't change anything basic.

And so I think that for this and other reasons, we have what I call an immaculate dictatorship. And I don't like to say brainwashing, but when I say cultural/educational control, but it sure is there. There just is an amazing lack of any kind of really challenging, basic challenging, going on in the educational system. And the culture, there is some, but I don't think it ever gets beyond sort of a fairly isolated area.

So I just — it's very chilling, and I don't see how suddenly thousands of people are going to rise up and say, No more. Which is one reason that I think building the alliances between those people who might — being peoples of color primarily, although not exclusively — is so important. Because somebody's got to really challenge this system. I mean, it isn't as though the black movement today is that strong; it's not as strong as it once was, one can say for sure. But I still think there's

a level of anger there, and demand for positive change that can be fortified and expanded, and we might even have a new movement one of these days. And I'm just hoping that some of these lazy Latinos will just wake up (laughs) and see what they should be doing, too. But it's very hard to see the prospect of major change in this society coming soon.

The one most positive factor in all this is that the economy of the United States is in trouble. It is in real trouble. It's in trouble with competition from China and India. I mean, they are just — not necessarily for the benefit of their own people, but they are just beating the U.S. down in terms of the balance of payments and all kinds of things. And see, I think those boys upstairs know that, and that's one reason they are kind of locking in on public opinion. But I really think that within 50 years, U.S. capitalism is going to be in a lot of trouble, if not less time. It already is, and all the stuff that's going on, the so-called globalization, is really trying to spread the capitalist crisis around more places than ever before.

So I think in a lot of ways, the most encouraging possibility — and it's only a possibility — the most encouraging current thing to observe is perhaps the possibility of serious economic decline in this country, which might then cause a real upsurge of demand by workers and working-class people. We've got to have something different here. So.

ROSS: Well, you have not strayed far from your socialist days. (laughs)

MARTINEZ: I know. Yeah.

ROSS: What do you think about the role of media in the crisis?

MARTINEZ: Good god. Other than the independent media, other than what you can read on the Internet that tells you the truth a lot of the time, it's sickening. It's so weak. It doesn't challenge anything. I mean. It just is not doing any good at all, and if it discovers a scandal, it's going to be some girlfriend of somebody, I don't know, whatever they're doing. But anything else, they'll drop it in a day or two. And then they'll support — their absolutely intransigent position on Israel, on supporting Israel, is the most obvious example of what I'm trying to say, because it's just horrible, you know?

ROSS: Well, what's going on?

MARTINEZ: Hmm? You know, I've got to get some water.

ROSS: Take a minute. (pause) Well, what do you think is going on in Lebanon? Because it does seem to — if you dare criticize the invasion of Lebanon, you get accused of anti-Semitism.

MARTINEZ: Yeah, I know.

ROSS: And that has silenced a lot of people who think what is going on is wrong. What's your opinion?

MARTINEZ: Uhh! Hezbollah captured three Israeli soldiers. They're based in Lebanon; they have areas of Lebanon they control, which the government hasn't kicked them out of. OK, it's not a huge — three soldiers, OK? I don't know how many hundreds of Lebanese children and women have been —

ROSS: Last count, seven hundred.

MARTINEZ: Seven hundred, yeah — and that's probably modest — have been killed by Israeli attacks. I mean, in terms of the media thing, I heard a report on the Internet that the mother of one of the three soldiers captured had begged the Israeli government, "Don't attack Lebanon because of my son" — the same way, too, women spoke out after 9/11. They said, Don't start a war because my son was killed in the World Trade Center. But do you hear about that? No, you don't hear about that. In either case, you don't hear about it — either 9/11 or the Israeli [invasion].

And I mean, to compare Hezbollah with the Israeli military is like a bad joke. I mean, yeah, so they have rockets. So they go bing-bing, you can fire away. I don't think that they have a whole air force; I don't think they have a likelihood of possible nuclear weapons. I mean, this is not a war between two forces of any equality, even though it's depicted that way. And the media is disgusting.

ROSS: It does seem to be disproportionately taking a toll on the civilian population of Lebanon.

MARTINEZ: That's putting it mildly, yeah.

ROSS: Well, what about the U.S. project of remaking the Middle East? Because this is all —

MARTINEZ: Oh yeah. You know, no —

ROSS: — part of that plan to attack, in my opinion, Iran and Syria.

MARTINEZ: Yeah.

ROSS: I mean, I feel like Israel is acting as our surrogates.

MARTINEZ: Yeah.

ROSS: Our meaning our government's —

MARTINEZ: That's right.

ROSS: – surrogates.

MARTINEZ: No, absolutely. No, I hold the U.S. responsible for what Israel is doing to Lebanese civilians. It is ultimately responsible because of its backing of that kind of military. So, yeah, it's kind of almost beyond belief. I mean, the United States could not do more to pave the way for more 9/11s than what it's doing now. Which is not the only argument against it, but don't people sort of wake up and say, Wait a minute, now we have three new enemies?

ROSS: Well, I'm intrigued by your comparison of our modern period in the early twenty-first [century] to the McCarthy period.

MARTINEZ: Yeah.

ROSS: The amount of fear that seemed to be dominant in the McCarthy period, I've never heard anybody quite compare this period to then.

MARTINEZ: Oh!

ROSS: What do you think is similar?

MARTINEZ: Well, no. I only compared it to — and the last period we could mention as being really scary, you know, and super-oppressive, killing free speech, that kind of thing. And a lot of the victims, like free speech, of the McCarthy period are happening again now. There was no Homeland Security then, but McCarthy could have gone on and proposed that, in quotes. So that's why. I don't know of any other period in U.S. history that was as repressive of freedom of speech and other constitutional rights and procedures, you know? And it wasn't anything like it is now. It's much worse now. But that was the only other period I could think of to compare it to. And maybe I should have gone back to something much earlier, in the '20s. But I just — I only went back to that. Yeah.

ROSS: Well, certainly we've had our genocides.

40:05
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MARTINEZ: Yeah.

ROSS: One of the things that intrigues me about your body of work as an activist is its span, your consciousness developing during the Depression, and how that has affected everything you do in terms of understanding the power of people to make change. I was not born during the Depression, or alive, but one of the things I've always pondered about the Depression was the country could have gone to the right or to the left at that time. And why it ended up where we are now is a big mystery to me, because it would have been just as logical to have strong labor unions, strong worker protections, strong anti-

imperialist policy. So given your span of that history, what do you think explains this, going from the Depression to today?

MARTINEZ: OK. Well, No, I wasn't that aware of that Depression, OK — much more World War II.

ROSS: Yet you've kept all those newspapers, you had said?

MARTINEZ: Oh, yeah, I told you. Yeah. I can't believe it! I got rid of a lot of them. I have two of them left for souvenirs. Anyway, World War II had much more of an influence on me. See, World War II, I mean, the way it was cast for most people, including me, was as a war of good against evil, right, us against Hitler and Nazism and all the concentration camps and everything else. So, in retrospect, it was something more complicated than that, for sure, but at the time, you could sort of think — people even today say, That was the last good war. You know, people will say that, meaning the last war against very clearly defined evil, and where we were glad they were the victors. OK.

So, and I think that I was glad of that, but I was also appalled by the realities of war, and people dying, and the concentration camps and everything else. So I kind of came out of a period where, I guess, the combination of horror and hope, or something like that, you know? And so that's probably been some of what's lingered all this time.

But I think where we went is an indication. I mean, it's interesting, because you could almost say, Oh, that's why you think the next good thing will be economic collapse here, because the Depression at least brought about some good stuff, right? (laughs) I hadn't thought about that, but you gave me another argument. And there's lots of —

ROSS: But a lot of people suffered.

MARTINEZ: Oh, of course! No, I'm not wishing for another Depression. I'm just — sometimes, that can move a country out of where it's been. In some kind of way, it adds up to taking positive steps in some long-range thing. I don't know. Anyways.

ROSS: Well, the Depression gave us the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

MARTINEZ: That's right.

ROSS: That, combined with World War II —

MARTINEZ: Yes. Yeah.

ROSS: We wouldn't even be talking about human rights if —

MARTINEZ: That's right.

ROSS: – it hadn't been for both the Depression and that world war.

MARTINEZ: Yeah.

ROSS: And so, something good certainly did come out of it.

MARTINEZ: Yes, and the quote New Deal, which by and large offered people something.

ROSS: Well, what do you think about today's Democratic Party?

MARTINEZ: Oh my god! I don't want to think about it! It is so weak! It is so feeble! It was so silent! It is so — nothing! I mean, it's extraordinary to me that even as a competitive party, it doesn't take its opportunity, or what I see as its opportunity. And that's the most scary thing of all, you know, Loretta, because I mean, they're so won over by the immaculate dictatorship that they're not going to question, even when questioning might win them some power, some new influence. They're not going to, and it's scary, you know? They believe this, too. They don't dare criticize a war that 40 to 55 percent of the country is against? You know, public opinion is way ahead of the Democratic Party. Whoa! So, yeah.

ROSS: Well, I think Kweisi Mfume had the right analysis when he said, "The last thing America needs is two Republican Parties." (laughter)

MARTINEZ: Yeah, indeed.

ROSS: Well, we are winding down –

MARTINEZ: Oh, good.

ROSS: – towards the end of this interview.

MARTINEZ: Yes.

ROSS: I can see you're getting a little tired.

MARTINEZ: I'm getting a little tired, too. Yeah.

ROSS: And I really appreciate your participating with us. Are there any last reminiscences or gifts you'd like to make? Anything we didn't cover?

MARTINEZ: One little thing: one little project I have which has been kind of fun. Fun isn't quite the word I want. About two years ago, I published an article in *Z Magazine* that I'd been thinking about for a long time. And the title of the article was, "Don't Call This Country 'America'." America is a

whole hemisphere full of millions of people of color, and this country is just the United States, and so, don't be so piggy about it. (laughs) So anyway, I wrote this article, and I talked to a lot of Native folks, and a lot of research, and duh-duh-duh-duh. So that was that, OK?

But then all of these progressive people — columnists, newspaper people, radio people — they kept doing it. OK. And that's what George Rorshachs did. So I got this idea. So I wrote (laughs) a little short letter, and I sent it off to get a couple of other big fish to sign it. So yes, I got Noam Chomsky to sign the letter, "Don't Call This Country 'America'." I got Howard Zinn to sign the letter. I got Julian Bond to sign the letter, all right? I got Rebecca Walker to sign the letter. So I got this letter all nice, and then I went through it. I had 37 names and addresses of people who have done this in their columns or whatever. So I had a nice envelope, duh-duh-duh-duh, and I sent off the letter. Anyway. And so I didn't get a single response, but OK. That's all right.

So then meanwhile, I collected about another 30 people who need to get the letter, and somebody's working on that. But the day before yesterday, in the *Chronicle*, there's a column in there by a young woman [Farai Chideya] called "Castro's Chops." It was about how dentistry in Cuba is better than here. (laughs)

ROSS: Well, that's true.

MARTINEZ: I mean, she took that as a kicking-off point to sort of talk about, you know, all this worry about Fidel, and well, guess what? His teeth are in better condition. (laughs) Anyway, and then she went on. But near the end of the article, she said something about "in America," meaning this country. So I fired off my usual letter to her, and I was amazed. About four or five hours later came back an answer from her, and she said, "You are absolutely right. Thank you so much. I will watch out for this in the future. I'm so glad you wrote me." So I got one columnist on my side. Anyway. (laughs)

48:35

So it kept me going. And so, that's my little whatever project from now on, the now-and-then project that I do, because well, there's a whole mentality that goes with it, with people who — see, 90 percent of people just do it. It's automatic. It's habit. It's just habit. They're not thinking in some imperialist way. It's just habit. And I know that. But I always have to point it out, because it does encourage a whole overview of empire, which is not what the person usually means or wants to say. But why not, you know, watch for it? So then I say, "Look, my little lesson: it's OK if you want to say you're an American, because that's all right, so long as you realize that everybody else in the hemisphere is also an American." (laughs) I like that. So what I am objecting to is not [the word] American, because we're all Americans, including people in Bolivia and Chile and Canada and all of that. But don't call *this* country America. So, American is OK.

So that's one of my little tidbits. I have little tidbits like that. I have this little mini-wars that I conduct. (laughs)

ROSS: OK.

MARTINEZ: And people — some of them: “Oh, that’s the woman who doesn’t like America!” Well, why not? But sometimes, you know, it just starts people thinking, and I think especially these days, with so much going on in Latin America — you know, you asked about Hugo Chávez a while ago. I mean, there’s a whole lot going on in Latin America, and there’s an overall push to the left overall — not every country, and not everything, but I find it very encouraging, you know? So anyway — to make [President] George [Bush] nervous, yes?

ROSS: Are you in touch with your relatives in Mexico, and do you have contact with them?

MARTINEZ: Yeah. Well, I just saw them.

ROSS: When’s the last time you were there?

MARTINEZ: Well, (whispers) but they’re all for the wrong person. Well, one of them doesn’t support Calderón, but she doesn’t say much about it because all the others do. What can I say? Oh well. (Ross laughs) I just don’t talk about it with them.

ROSS: Well, you know, the universe gives us friends as an apology for the family we have. (laughs)

MARTINEZ: Yeah. All right. Oh, yeah. A lot of people, friends down there I know, they are in the right place. But oh, my cousins, I don’t know. But my cousin’s wife, mmm, there’s hope for her. Yeah.

ROSS: OK. So is there a lot of interaction? Do they get a chance to come to the States often enough?

MARTINEZ: No, they don’t. They don’t, you know? I think it’s probably money — just the cost of transportation — and yeah. One of one of my cousins has a daughter that is really, really cool. What is she now? Twelve, I think. I’d really like her to come up here and have fun with her, and maybe brainwash her in the other direction. (laughs)

ROSS: Does Tessa get down there often?

MARTINEZ: Not as often as she should. I tried to get her to go last Christmas, because we used to go at Christmas, you know? And I couldn’t get her to do it. I don’t know. She had some boyfriend. I don’t know. (laughs)

ROSS: Quite often, only children –

MARTINEZ:            Yes.

ROSS:                 – re-embrace family in a particular way.

MARTINEZ:            That’s true. I know.

ROSS:                 – because they feel a little lonely.

MARTINEZ:            I know, and I like that. I like that.

ROSS:                 And not Tessa?

MARTINEZ:            I don’t think it applies very much for her.

ROSS:                 OK.

MARTINEZ:            But, you know. Yeah.

ROSS:                 So are there any final thoughts that you’d like to offer or share?

MARTINEZ:            My goodness. Wow. Well –

ROSS:                 What has your life meant?

MARTINEZ:            Well, one last thing is, people keep telling me that I should write some kind of memoir, because I’ve been through all this stuff. I never want to do it, right? My friend Phil Hutchings always said, “I’m not talking about *that* book” — meaning the *Five Hundred Years* — “I’m talking about *the* book.” He needles me about that.

Anyway, a couple of weeks ago, there was an event here that Global Exchange put on, its big annual fundraiser, and one of the three people who got an award that night was the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano. And I love Galeano’s books. I mean, his book *Open Veins of Latin America* was an absolute eye-opener for many people, and *Days and Nights of Love and War*. So anyway, I marched up to him at the bar, and I said, “You know, I’ve always liked your book *Days and Nights of Love and War* so much. And so sometimes,” I said, “people are always telling me I should write my memoirs. And I said, ‘I can’t do that.’ But then I thought one day, I could do it maybe like your book, *Days and Nights of Love and War*.” Which is like, every chapter is like, a snapshot of some experience, but there’s not a linear development to it. They’re not all in a line, and then I did this, and then I did that. It’s just like, you know, little pieces of it.

And Galeano, to my absolute amazement, said, “You’re absolutely right! Of course!” This is all in Spanish. “That’s the only way to do it: you can’t possibly do it any other way!” He got into my memoir! Anyway, it was so encouraging. So it kind of encouraged me to think

about doing this, is the long and the short of it. And he's an amazing writer. So –

ROSS:                    What type of –

MARTINEZ:            – maybe I'll do it.

ROSS:                    What type of support do you need to do that?

MARTINEZ:            Oh, I don't know, Loretta, because there's so much to do out in the world. I have to finish this book first, OK? And then maybe just really just do political work for like a year, just really dig into stuff like this alliance building, and then maybe take off time again to do the writing. I just don't want to do anything like that now. I want to get out in the world much more. So.

ROSS:                    (laughs) You sound as if you're 16 and just discovering that.

MARTINEZ:            (laughs) Oh, well, you know? So, yeah.

ROSS:                    Well, there's an eternal youthfulness about you. In terms of this project, the Voices of Feminism Project, I've asked you before would you consider putting your papers and memorabilia at Smith College. And what's your plans for that?

MARTINEZ:            I have no plan, OK? And I think that — let me look a little bit more into what other places offer, the kind of care and — maintenance, I guess, is the word I want — that Smith seems to offer for these things. I'm not *opposed* to it in any way. I just want to look at everything. And I guess the only hesitation I have comes from the idea of, Well, but who would look for me at Smith College? Because I'm not much of an East Coast person.

ROSS:                    It's going to be on the web.

MARTINEZ:            Yeah. So that may be –

ROSS:                    So anybody can get to it from around the world.

56:17

MARTINEZ:            Yeah, yeah. So that may be the answer. So I have to think over things like that. So you just answered one question. Yeah. And so.

ROSS:                    I had those same concerns about access.

MARTINEZ:            Uh-huh. Yeah.

ROSS:                    Because you know, communities that I represent aren't going to go to Northampton –

MARTINEZ:            Right. They're not in Massachusetts, right.

ROSS:                 – to do research.

MARTINEZ:            Yeah.

ROSS:                 But two things persuaded me to put my papers at Smith. First of all, nobody had access to them in the basement of my house.

MARTINEZ:            No. (laughter) Or in my garage.

ROSS:                 Exactly. So it's not like *I* was creating access.

MARTINEZ:            Yes, right.

ROSS:                 And the fact that they are handled so exquisitely and made so widely available through the technology nowadays.

MARTINEZ:            Yeah. Right, yeah.

ROSS:                 Those two things persuaded me. And I would have to say the third factor was that I didn't have to do any work. They came and packed it up, did all the sorting –

MARTINEZ:            Really?

ROSS:                 – and everything.

MARTINEZ:            Well, that's very attractive.

ROSS:                 There was no pre-sorting done on my part.

MARTINEZ:            Really?

ROSS:                 And that which they didn't need, which included old checkbooks and things like that –

MARTINEZ:            Yeah, I know. All that crapola.

ROSS:                 – they just sent it back to me!

MARTINEZ:            That's very attractive.

ROSS:                 And so they will actually send someone –

MARTINEZ:            Really?

ROSS:                    – to do the packing for you.

MARTINEZ:            Have you seen those file cabinets? Did I show you those file cabinets?

ROSS:                    You have seen nothing. We had to open some of my file cabinets with crowbars.

MARTINEZ:            (laughs) Oh no!

ROSS:                    Because they had gotten wet and rusted.

MARTINEZ:            Oh no!

ROSS:                    So I would encourage you to think of this as being –

MARTINEZ:            OK. Well, those are good arguments. Those are good arguments.

ROSS:                    – much easier than you might be anticipating that it is. Because I thought I would have to spend hours pre-sorting and cataloguing. They took 27 boxes, returned to me a couple of years later a beautifully indexed archive. And anything that didn't belong in the archives, they sent back to me.

MARTINEZ:            Yeah. And then *you* could throw it out.

ROSS:                    Yeah!

MARTINEZ:            Like those canceled checks, yeah.

ROSS:                    Exactly! And so, my final question is, how do you want to get a copy of this, on DVD or VHS tapes? You get a copy of it.

MARTINEZ:            Well, I can't believe it — I had a DVD player, and it stopped working and I couldn't get it fixed, so I threw it away. I have to have a DVD player because so much is on DVD these days. However, in the meantime, I don't, and so VHS is fine. I mean, I don't know which is less trouble for you all or whatever — probably the DVD.

ROSS:                    I don't think it matters to Smith.

MARTINEZ:            It doesn't matter? OK. OK.

ROSS:                    OK. So you're saying VHS?

MARTINEZ:            Yeah. Yeah. Probably, yeah.

ROSS:                    All right, then.

MARTINEZ: Although, you know, on second thought — well, it can always be made into a DVD, can't it?

ROSS: You can actually ask for both.

MARTINEZ: Oh, both? Yeah, both is best.

ROSS: One of each?

MARTINEZ: That would be great. This guy got me on the radio last week, Friday or Thursday, on the LA Pacifica station.

ROSS: KPFA?

MARTINEZ: Yeah. No, KPFA is the one here.

ROSS: KPFK?

MARTINEZ: KPFK, yeah. So I was called at the last minute by a friend of mine who is an activist in El Salvador, and she said, "Could you get on the radio tonight, eight o'clock, with so-and-so, and so on, so on? He wants to talk about" — I said, "What does he want to talk about?" Anyway. I said, "How long is it?" She said, "Well, it starts at eight. It'll be over by nine. But you don't have to be there the whole time." Ha, ha. So I thought, Well, that's good.

I get on that program — the guy calls me up; really nice guy — and what does he want to talk about? My life! For one solid hour! (gasps) Oh boy. I said, "You're as bad as Loretta." (laughter) Anyway, so yeah.

ROSS: Well, thank you for doing this project. I know it can feel a little like an invasive surgery of your life, but —

MARTINEZ: Oh, no. It makes me —

ROSS: — it's so important for people who come behind you.

MARTINEZ: It makes me think, and there's a lot of things I haven't really thought through, or, you know, kind of done any kind of final evaluation of and stuff like that. I really —

ROSS: Well, I like the fact that you get to tell us your story in your words, versus someone interpreting it 50 years from now.

MARTINEZ: Yeah.

ROSS: All right. Again, thank you from the Voices of Feminism Project.

MARTINEZ: OK, Loretta, thank you. And hey, we did pretty good.

ROSS: I think so.

1:00:52

END TAPE 3

END OF INTERVIEW

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