

Tape summary of interviews conducted on November 5 and 10, 1991.

Interviewee: Antonio "Tony" Hernandez Rodriguez
1704 1st Street, South
Nampa, Idaho 83651
(208) 467-5804

Interviewer: Patricia McDaniel
1201 North 5th Street
Boise, Idaho 83703
(208) 385-9945

TAPE 1:

Side A:

6 - 21: Family immigration: Maternal great grandmother came from Spain, while his paternal grandfather was from Mexico. The grandfather came to the United States in 1876 to work.

21-65: Early childhood: Tony was born in Karnus (sp?) City, Texas. Mother dies in 1925, and the children live his grandmother, Luisa Guerra Gomez until '29 when father marries Maria Selina Rodriguez.

Family works for a Texas farmer named Henry Skinner on a ranch until 1937 when Tony is 17 years old. Tony's father decides to leave the ranch and move into the city because there is no work at the ranch.

Tony describes discrimination he meets when he attempts to apply for a job with the CCC. He is unable to work for the CCC because he is Mexican American. The family is very poor because of the depression and discrimination, but because of their livestock and own garden the family is able to sustain itself very well.

66-86: Education: Tony's education is lacking because of the seasonal work he does with his family in Texas. He works from February until November and is not in school during those months.

102-120: Move to Idaho: In 1940 father hears of possible work in Idaho, and the family makes the move in 1941, arriving in Aberdeen, Idaho on May 6, 1941. The whole family comes to Idaho in a truck. Tony likens their travel to that of livestock being transported. The family goes to work for a farmer named George. (Not able to determine the last name.) The work was to entail preparing potatoes for seeding. Tony gives a description of this work. He also explains that at the end of the first day each was paid \$5.00 in sterling silver pieces. "We fell in love with Idaho at that moment." The boys gave the money to their father, who couldn't believe that the money was honest money.

The family continues to work in the Aberdeen area, eventually earning up to \$25 or \$30 daily. The father decides that the family would continue to stay on in Idaho and not return to Texas. "Texas no tiene nada para nosotros." Tony is married by this time and lives in an apartment with his family. Tony explains that his father says that he, Tony, is old enough to live on his own and lead his own life. Tony speaks very highly of his father.

233-292: Community live in Aberdeen: Initially there were only two families, the Mercados and the Longoria (sp?) who had been there since 1938. By 1942 two or three more families had arrived. The Hispanic community was small, not even a Catholic church was there for them. Mexicans did not hold positions of power in employment nor in the community. Eventually this changed, with a church being built, and the Mexican community growing into a strong, large community today.

293-380: Military duty: Was drafted in 1944, and was to be sent to Europe just as the war there was ending. Eventually was sent with the Peace Keeping forces.

380-410" Return to U.S. and Nampa, Idaho: Tony returned to the U.S. knowing that he wanted to study; he recognized his lack of education and was eager to learn.

Side B:

413:466: School - Learning to be a barber: Tony was able to go to Barber school in Nampa. His education was paid for by the government as he was a veteran. After six months of apprenticeship, Tony opened his own barber shop in his home.

466-495: More schooling: Tony continued to want more schooling, and took classes in government, political science, accounting, typewriting, and penmanship. It was during this time that he became even more aware of his rights, and began to question the discrimination he had encountered.

495-690: Discrimination: Around 1959 signs began to appear in some establishments in Nampa, signs that discriminated against Jews, Mexicans, Indians, etc. At this same time, Tony was an active member in community organizations, Eagles, Knights of Columbus, American Legion, etc. He learned through these associations a lot about his position in the community.

Relates a story about his daughter coming home from a field trip saying that a sign discriminating against Mexicans had been in a window that she and some friends had seen. Because she was so upset about this, Tony decided to become active in anti-discrimination efforts. He was encouraged by his community

associations, and by the parish priest who advocated rational behavior, and to look to God for guidance. Tony continued to get help from his community organizations. Documents outlining discrimination were sent to Washington. Tony was also instrumental in putting together a group of minorities to assist in passing Idaho bill 217, an anti-discrimination bill. Continued growth of influence in the community. Eventually signs of discrimination in Nampa began to disappear.

It was also during this period that Tony received the "Idaho Distinguished Citizen Award".

690- **Reaction of Tony's children:** Children became aware of the position their father held in the community. Newspapers sought out his opinions, etc.

Tony finished this tape with some philosophizing about his position among the Hispanic community and his work for his people. He reflects on the progress of the Hispanic community.

Tape 2

Side A:

06-46: **Heritage:** Tony refers to himself as a Mexican American, as were his parents. Discrimination in Texas was a direct result of Tony's heritage. There, there was no opportunity in employment nor in civic affairs. Tony was aware of this at an early age, but made an effort not to deny his Mexican heritage as a result. He is very proud of his heritage, and points out that there are more Spanish speaking peoples of the world than English.

46-91: **Influence of limitations in Texas:** Tony attended separate schools in Texas, and at an early age became aware of the discrimination. He knew what it was like to be a minority. Even though he learns about his rights as an American citizen, he knows that the law is determined by those who are in control. Jobs of any consequence are for whites only.

Tony relates a story about being offered a dish washing job for \$.15 a day. The employer knows his family and says that all the family works hard. Tony tells his dad about the offer. Tony's dad recognizing the underlying bigotry, tells Tony not to take the job unless the offer goes up to \$.50 a day. Tony does develop a grudge against whites.

91-114: **Schooling:** He was taught about equal rights in school, yet feels that the teachers were limited or hampered about what they could teach their Mexican-American students. The teachers also pushed their Mexican-American students ahead even though they were not prepared for the next levels or grades. This meant that the students were not able to complete when they reached the upper

grades. Mexican American girls were educated too, but were not encouraged to succeed.

114-125: **Idaho:** At about 17 or 18 Tony learns about Idaho.

125-202: **Discrimination in the job market - education as a way out of poor paying jobs.** Tony believes that Mexican Americans feel discrimination when they are unable to secure employment. He tells of a time when he became involved with the police department so as to check on discrimination in hiring practices. He learned that education, or lack of it, is what has kept Mexican Americans from being hired onto the police force. Tony recognizes that those who have come to Idaho are farm laborers; they are not professionals. The seasonal quality of the work keeps the educational opportunities to a minimum. He does see some change in the younger generations of those laborers who decided to stay. Those young people are being hired for better jobs.

202-276: **Customs:** The Catholic church is the central cultural force, as Tony sees it. He describes the small Catholic church in Karns City, Texas. The Mexican American priest encouraged love rather than hatred. Tony questioned his own hatred at that time.

The Catholic holidays and customs are strong among the Hispanic community. Children are taught about these holidays and have the sense of tradition because of the identity with the Church. One church holiday that separates Mexican Catholicism from Anglo is the celebration of 12 de diciembre, La Virgen de Guadalupe.

276-300: **Other holidays:** Cinco de mayo, 16 de septiembre. Tony explains that the Cinco de mayo is strongly observed in Nampa and 16 de septiembre in Boise.

300-390: **Passing identity to children:** Tony has a strong sense of his Mexican identity and has passed this on to his children. He kept them close at hand while they were growing up, and was able to influence them by teaching them about the culture. He also remembered his own poverty, and encouraged his own children to recognize their own rights and opportunities. He always wanted his children to act within the law.

Side 2:

400-500: **Bringing up his children:** Tony tells the story of relating to his children that his family came to Idaho to better itself. He makes an analogy to the travels of Jesus to better the lives of others. Tony wanted his children to rely on God and Jesus and the teachings. They were not to hold grudges, etc. Tony tried to lead by example; he held his children in high regard with respect, and he wanted them to show that to him.

Tony feels that respect in the Mexican culture is stronger than in the white. The Mexican family is strong in the Mexican culture. Money plays a large role in influencing the degree to which a culture holds respect to be important. Tony compares Anglo families to Mexican families, and feels that many Anglo parents don't play an active enough roll in the lives of their children. Tony does feel that this is now happening to Mexican families too. Tony tells a story about his father using a whip to teach Tony a lesson. The father only used the whip once at a time when Tony was disrespectful and disobeyed his father.

505-532: **Cultural events in Idaho:** When the family first arrived in Aberdeen, Idaho, there were no cultural events because so much of the time was spent working. There were some gatherings when people ate tamales and drank beer together and played some ball.

532- **Tony starts the observance of 16 de septiembre in Nampa:** In 1957 Tony called all the leaders of the labor camps together to plan a fiesta. He explains a good way to get Mexican people together is to offer them beer and food, so Tony did that from his restaurant. He organizes the group emphasizing commitment. Tony gives a detailed description of the planning of the event. Many businesses in Nampa sponsored the event. Mexicans gave money. Everyone in the community helped in one way or another, and the fiesta was a huge success. In succeeding years Tony had to bow out of his participation because his own business was growing, and he had to devote more time to it. But because of his initial work in the event, it continues today to be successful.

600- **Reflections on the future of the Hispanic culture in Idaho:** Tony feels generally optimistic about the future for his people, especially in the areas of education and job opportunity. He makes the correlation between better education and better employment. He is confident to a certain point about the culture, but does feel that as the newer generations come along there will be less and less identity with the culture. One way that this erosion might be curbed is by a continued influx of Hispanics from the south. Tony tells about Gilberto Flores of Nampa who has a dance hall where on Sundays he brings in music groups from the south. These dances are very popular, and Tony feels that by such events the culture will continue to be reaffirmed.

He talks about his own involvement in the community, and recognizes his own influence and the high regard that the Hispanic and Anglo communities have for him.