

MIKE SANCHEZ & MRS. SANCHEZ

JOE AMAYO & MRS. JOE AMAYO

Francisco Ruiz

Millie Rivera

AMAYO: Mexican Americans came way before any of the other groups or nationalities I'm going to tell the reason why. A Mexican American, a Chicano is part Spanish and part Indian. And the Conquistadores when they explored here in Kansas they got a little dirty with the Indian gals. the reason I know this is because my subject in h.s. and in college was history and I read history way back and I know we got here around 1912 I was born in Los Angeles, I used to hear these to hear these people, the Mexican people, the few that were and some of them was already born here. See the Mexican started way back when the R.R.S started bringing those in 1922 right after the war in 1917. There were already a lot of Mexican people here, that were working in the fields, because they're farmers. And they were kept down because they were not educated, because the farm would want them to work on the farms. Now my father which died he was a mining engineer. He worked for the old It was owned by German Co.

And he was a mining engineer, and I remember when he came here he use to hear some people talk way back, there were not too many of them, but they were already here. Right at that time the people was educated them In other wards the people that came at that time here grade school, they had more education then a boy who finished high school here in the U.S. because in Mexico the people that were in southern California the Mexican people had had education but there were very few, but the rest of them they kept them down because they want to keep them in the field, they want to keep them to work on the field, and they always encouraged them the more children you have the more money you're going to make, so some of the Mexican women they grow kids they had to make money, thats why the Mexican people had large families, they needed a lot of hands, a lot of help. Sure there were a lot of Mexican people came in after the war, world war I and a big strick when the railroad brought in some of them people over to work, for the companies, they worked for the railroad, there were so many of them that at winter time they couldn't keep warm because they were working on the tracks, so they had to lay some off, the packing house found out that those Mexicans were real good workers, because they didn't know too much, all they knew was to work, and then the packing house began to hire. And then the steel plant, my father, my first father he was employed by the old mining and steels they worked them lady I know, and they worked. So if you want to go back to the ancient of the Mexican people I had one old fellow tell me that you can go to all of the four corners of the world and you find Mexicans. All you have to do is go to the restaurants and if you hear the guy tell the waiter, hey you got any hot chilli thats a Mexican. If you want to go back to the history of the Mexican people you have to go way back. some of them here which you not call U.S. could move around to a different states from around here.

Oppenhiemer What we're trying to do get a picture how Mexicans originated around here as far back as possible up to the present time.

Ruiz But, the focus of this particular film strip is Kansas

film City, Kansas, which is the Armourdale, Rosedale, Argentine and you can't go back much further than 1910, I question it, I'd had my arguments, its mostly 1917, world war I. Obviously because there is a in Mexico, total chaos, civil war everybody begins to leave Mexico in 1910,

very few before that time. you will find some that were there from the year 1. But were talking about Kansas City, Ks. and thats not more than 60 years, 65 years, maybe ... make it 70 if its fits you

Amayo: you better make it longer than that, I see your point, you just want the story of the midwest. The industrial, the railroad and the packers.

Oppenhiemer: For example the U.S. census counted in 1900, 71 what they called Mexicans living in the state of Kansas, and I have counted already over 200 which lived in Topeka. Almost all of them worked for the railroad, and we were counting them off the railroad list of workers. In the year 1900.

Woman: "That's why we're under counted in the time"

Oppenhiemer: The railroad of Topeka, had on its list of employees at least 250, if we assume that most of those employees were married, say half, and thats over 300 and we can assume that probably most of those had some kind of family.

Tape stops

The problem is finding records, We don't have records, so what we were hoping is... " My mother, when they came from Mexico, they came from when they was coming they came through Chi had a lot of cattle, and they tell me they used to (Can't hear) Oklahoma, and thats when they started working, and from there on to Newton, when they moved to Newton it was already in 1908, see my sister was then 7 years old. Anyhow they had to cross the stateline, my father went to work in the railroad, but then in 1908 he moved to Newton, Ks.

Amayo: I think you just want the stories of the railroads here in Kansas and Argentine in the packing houses.

Ruiz: A general story a pattern, were not interested in any personal secrets being led out of the bag. About how it felt to be alive for men, women and children, say 60 years ago.

And you were a little boy obviously, I'm not trying to be facetious, you finished high school, what about 1930 1931,

Amayo: I got out in 1932. Probably one of the first high school graduates in this area. Mrs. Moreno, and her brother Alvarado. Which tells you something about the Immigration process that you did not get high school graduates in this area Mexicans until 1930, 1932. In 1929, my mother and Mrs. Alvarado they fought so that they could go into the high school, so they didn't want us in the h.s. They told us, you got your h.s. on out and work in the field. Mr. Alvarado, he was a well educated man from Mexico City and he was a shoemaker. He could make beautiful shoes, and he had some of those big people from Missouri come over to Now he fought because he had a daughter and a son that he wanted them to go to high school, and they fought and fought, and fought and then with the help of two doctors, a teacher and an attorney they got in with these 3 or four...and that's when I started learning how to box, when I went to high school, (laughter) I either Knew how to fight, or else too bad for Joe. And we were the first to open things up for the kids there. There was nobody there, even in Wyandotte or anything, going to high school. Argentine. From then, well, people began to come and then the depression came and, oh, if I give you the story you can make a fortune out of it if you can get the right one.

Ruiz: Keep talking!

Amayo: Well, that's the story. Well, you see, if you're coming back to the railroads...

Carmen(?); Excuse me, just a minute...

(TAPE IS STOPPED)

Amayo: My first radio, the guys, we had to make our own radios out of the... crystal set.

Mrs. Amayo: ....When we were little we didn't have nothing to entertain us, we didn't have any toys or anything. We couldn't afford no toys. In my family there 14 in our family, so...we couldn't afford nothing

Munoz: That's true.

Ruiz: Fil is a youngster, he's...39 and holding.

Munoz: Holding. (laughter)

Ruiz: What can you tell us about your...

(TAPE IS STOPPED)

MUNOZ: ...around 1925-24, and then after he had found a job and a place to live he sent for the rest of the family.

(SOUNDS OF MICROPHONE BEING BUMPED AROUND)

Ruiz: Where did they come from in Mexico?

Munoz: San Miguel El Alto en Jalisco, Mexico.

Ruiz: Por eso aparece bueno. (laughter) Usted sabia que en Jalisco todos son... (MUFFLED)... rubios... (MUFFLED)

Amayo: Alli fue...all the Irish went and settled in that mine(?) and they done the dirty work, (laughter)

Ruiz: But you know what happened to the Indians in Jalisco, right off? Exterminated! That's why they're all blond and blue-eyed and just as poor as the Indians. It is told that a French battalion got lost there and that's why they find a lot of

Ruiz (cont.): blue-eyed Indians, too.

Carmen Ayala-or Millie Rivera: Could we maybe get down to some of the other basic things in reference to your family in particular, like why did they come? Do you have any idea...were they coming for a job, or...

Munoz: Well, my father came here because a daughter of his was already here, married, with her husband who worked in a packing house. He came here and got a job in the packing house and sent for us. That was one of the reasons, and the other reason was I guess, there was a revolution going on in Mexico at the time so he wanted to by-pass that.

Ruiz: Especially in 1925 there were the bloody religious wars in Jalisco and that part of Mexico, over the separation of church and state. It's too easy to forget, really the revolution lasted until 1929. And the business about under the constitution of 1917 in Mexico that the church not interfere in politics. And there were extremes on both ends but the highest flow of immigration was in 1926-27. More so than in 1910 or 1920. So that's a good reason, as you say. Lots of people at home, no jobs, and the other thing that we tend to forget is that the big depression, the great depression started there first! ...In the mid-twenties before it hit here in '29.

Millie Rivera: Do you remember anything about what the conditions were when they came. Did they talk about having problems with housing?

Munoz: Not specifically any trouble with housing because I think we were able to live with my sister for a couple monthes and then we found a house for rent in Amourdale, which is where I grew up. All the time that we were in Amourdale we always lived in a house. Now none of the houses had indoor plumbing. But we had housing. I didn't get out of the Amourdale community very much , but I know that in Argentine, you had people living - they worked for the ice plant -

living in box cars, as I recall. You were going to start to say something when she made that question...

Mrs. AMAYO: Well, that about the houses, you know, we couldn't live where ever we wanted to move. That's been since the beginning, until the late...I imagine even now. In some of the places a Mexican moves here, then the Anglos start moving all around you. Well, let them go! If they want to go, let them go!

Munoz: But in Armourdale, there was a little barrio where if there were any empty houses we could rent those houses.

Mrs. AMAYO: You know the community was about the same in Amourdale. Not too much difference. You know, they were all about the same. But over here in the Argentine are, why we couldn't pass 26th, could we?

Amayo: 25 th.

Mrs. AMAYO: 25th. I always wondered what the up there, because I believe I just opened my mouth too much and got around, cut corners, in fact, the first house that I bought, I didn't buy it, I had an anglo buy it for me. And that's the reason we got over there. An Anglo bought it for me, I told her to go buy that house. She went and made arrangements for me to see the lady and I went ahead and put the down payment, which I believe wasn't much because it was ten dollars monthly payments. And it was awful hard at that time to give a ten dollar payment. And that's the reason I got to from there. From that end you couldn't go west, if you wanted to. If you had the money, you couldn't go west.

2nd Mrs.: They painted racial slurs on the house and everything,

Amayo: Yeah, but most of that time all the Mexican people lived across the tracks, on the old camp v/here the Railroad made their campground. And very few of them lived on this side. We used to live on 2023 Harrison which was way up on the hill there, and then we moved down to 2310 Ruby, we lived ? we had to buy those houses outright in order to move in. Then I was raised by my step-father. At that time he worked for the steel plant. He worked at the structural steel plant. He worked hard; he was just a common laborer. And then we bought that house out on 2310 Ruby. That was when I was going to high school, no I take it back, I was still going to grade school. And I was going to Emerson at that time. And then they made the Clara Barton school over for all the Mexican people, the boys and girls That lived across the track, you know. But then the other Mexican people that lived on this side, they requested to send us over to Clara Barton. Then we had to go to Clara Barton, in Clara Barton it was mostly the people that lived in the Santa Fe camp which was a camp that the railroad made as a city for the Mexican people. They lived in box cars, now Mr. Munoz made a statement that the people lived in boxcars, at the ice plant. No they did not live in boxcars, They lived in houses. They lived in houses made close together, see? And then across the tracks there was the barracks for the employees of the railroad.

Carmen or Millie: They had barracks?

Amayo: Yeah, first they were in box cars, then they made them out of cement.

Millie: With or without plumbing?

Amayo: Oh, no plumbing, girl, in the winter time you had to shovel one block before you'd get to the john! (LAUGHTER) All the snow! Everything outside, no plumbing, no nothing. I remember... my stepfather, he was a very hardworking man but, he believed in clean -- being clean. He had a great big barn in the back where he had a great big water trough. I had to warm

up the water so that every time he'd come in he'd take a bath. And probably after he'd take a bath, then we'd take a bath and so on and so forth. But he was the first one. That was everyday. And in winter time, we had an old stove and we'd have to heat it up for him, for us to take a bath. And I'll never forget the first time he tried to get me up at four o'clock in the morning to take a bath, I thought he was crazy! But that's the way he was. Now those were the very few people that lived on this side, they lived in homes. A man that worked also for the structural steel, he was a blacksmith, his last name was Ortega. He was a blacksmith for the steel plant. And there was only two or three families that lived on this side. All the rest of them lived on the other side of the tracks. And of course, the people on this side, the Anglos on this side, they all... well in in our vicinity where we lived there were a lot of Germans

Ruiz: Did they have indoor plumbing? The Germans?

Amayo: Well, some of them did, some of them did.

Ruiz: I wonder when indoor plumbing became popular for everyone? It's too easy to say they didn't have plumbing.

Amayo: A lot of them homes had water and sewers and sinks, but on the other, on the john, why, you had to go outside to get it. Now this thing come up, your indoor plumbing, I mean, on this ...until after World War II, when a lot of these kids went to war and come back. That's when they begin to put a lot of pressure on this. Then, of course, one of my brothers, he went into plumbing and he started working a lot of plumbing. He'd do plumbing for the Mexican people and put in things. In 1935 we moved into that little house on Metropolitan and there was a big apartment house next me. My wife had the idea to buy the apartment house, because there were a lot of people looking for rooms and there were no rooms to rent to them. And that was what used to be called the old Metropolitan Hotel. It used to be right next to the Catholic church. I don't know if some of you people remember before the Reverend Luke(?) took the great big brick building, two story building. Right at the beginning, when I took it over—I was already working for the railroad—we had a lot of railroad people rooming upstairs. And we couldn't throw them out just like that because, you know, it was against the law. And they were Blancos, you couldn't throw them out, see? Anyway, soon as they would move out we'd rent the rooms to the Mexican people. Right after the flood, I made it into kitchenettes. Three room kitchenettes. I had Mexican people come in and rent, and live there for a long time until after urban renewal, they took it over. But in those early days, at the time, you would look back and you would say why didn't the Mexican people get education. Why didn't they send the kids to school? Because they kept them back! They didn't want them to go to school until they themselves made it possible? so they could attend school. At that time, your groceries and a lot of the things that you have to buy, you had to scuffle like hell to get it, because, you have heard a lot of the negro people say "they discriminate, they don't serve me, before they serve that other guy." They done it, too. A lot of times I used to stay there waiting, waiting until everybody went out, so I could buy a loaf of bread or something like that, so I could take it home. Mom used to give me hell, say "Where you been, playing? How come you didn't get here right quick? What took you so long to get here?" Because I was waiting until they serve...

Mrs. AMAYO And then they wonder a lot of times why the Mexicans have a chip on their shoulders. Now that's what they call a chip on the shoulder. Well, they have a lot of things that they can remember, that they had to put up with. They've been hurt in the housing and they've been hurt in everything. You go to the store and they're the first ones to be waited on, and

they're the first ones for everything. They haven't got a chip on their shoulders, they made them that way.

Amayo: You couldn't go to a restaurant at that time, before anywhere around here you couldn't go to a restaurant, sit down and say, "I want a meal." Because they had signs all over in fact right in the front window they had a sign saying, "we do not serve Mexicans here." And you'd go in and they'd tell you that you either have to eat it back in the kitchen or take it home. The first picture show they had here they had a section on one side, where they put all the Mexicans, to the left. Where Villa Real show is they used to be a person theater, a long time ago

Carmen or Millie: What was it?

Amayo: A person theater. And they had attendants that a fellow that he come up and grab you and take you to the side where you sit. At first some of the people, some of the older people, the Mexican people, they were too kind, too religious, they'd come and say "Oh, isn't he nice, he even took me to my seat." (LAUGHTER) I told them one time, "you know why they took you to that seat? Because he didn't want you to sit over here! you have to sit over there with the rest of them." And they had thought he was awful nice because he'd grab them and take them over there...

Ruiz: And you were watching American films?

several: Oh, yes.

Ruiz: No Mexican movies?

Group: No!

Ruiz: When did you get the first Mexican movies?

Amayo: Well, they used to have Mexican movies over in Missouri.

Ruiz: (MUFFLED)

Amayo: Yeah. The Mexican movies, they didn't start coming to the Villa Real until he took that theater over, then he started bringing Mexican films.

Carmen or Millie: You mentions a Catholic church and you mentioned also the fact that, you know, the reason that these people reacted that way, that "Oh this guy's so nice," is because they were very religious. What was the experience with the church?

Amayo: Let me tell you one thing, Now, I'm Catholic, you understand me? But we used to hear all these people talk about love thy neighbor and love so-and-so...You would go to the church of St. John the Evangelist, and you'd have to be careful where you sit because the...St John the Evangelist, course, I don't blame because they had their names on the seats. I would like to go back...before Emerson school I went to ST. John Evangelist Catholic, way back in the grade school back in the 17th through 18th, I remember. And we had a family there, Belgian people with the last name Bervakis(sp?) and they used to tell me to tell my mother and dad to sit on their chair because they were farmers they were potato growers up here at Turner, and they wouldn't come it until the late mass because they were out there working on the farm. And if we would go to eight o'clock mass we could use their's...

(END SIDE ONE OF TAPE)

SIDE TWO

...and then one day I told him, I said Mrs. Bervaki told us that we could sit here at eight o'clock mass. I could talk English good then because my parents they all talk English.

we spoke at my home very little Spanish. Our kids and my brother's they don't. They speak Spanish but not too good. Because all my family from way back—we'd speak English. Way back when Cortez, Coronado, some of them guys came here maybe, I don't know. Anyway, this fellow said to me, "say, you speak English pretty well." I didn't want to say nothing 'cause he might get mad. I could have said, "I'm an American just like you." But he would have said "You're nothing but a Mexican! Get out!" And he would throw me out. So I told him, "Well, we speak English in our home." So he said "You have to have a letter from Mrs. Bervaki, so you can sit there." And just about that time, the boy come in, the son. He asked me what was the trouble, so I told him they were trying to tell me not to sit there so he told the usher that his parents gave permission for us to come in and sit there at eight o'clock. And the people began to come to Argentine to work in the...And more people would go to the church, so then they got together and they bought that church St. John the Divine for the Mexican people because they didn't want them to go over at that time.

Ruiz: What year was that?

Amayo: That was way back in the twenties, '25, '26, way up to the '30s. That church used to be a Mason church.

Millie: When?

Amayos Oh, I can't recall when they purchased that.

MILLIE: Somewhere in the twenties?

Amayo: A little later than that.

(MUFFLED VOICES)

Amayo: In thirty two, when I got out of high school, the church was already there.

Woman: Well, the church was already there but I don't know if they had purchased it yet.

Ruiz: And that was the first church in Argentine for Mexicans?

group: Yes, in Argentine.

Ruiz: And in 1919 the Guadalupe was probably the very first in Kansas City, Missouri?

group: Yeah...(MUFFLED VOICES)...Armourdale...

Amayo: You see, that church at Guadalupe used to belong to the Irish,

(MUFFLED VOICES)

Millie: I'm sorry, you were saying that Monte Carlo was open...?

Munoz ...Already in existence when my family came here to Kansas City, Kansas.

Millie: Which was...?

Munoz 1926 or '27.

Ruiz: ...set aside for Mexicans...

Amayo: Yeah, that was made for Mexicans. Even right there at St. Thomas,

Amayo (cont.): which was a strong Catholic church, they didn't want no Mexicans in there.

MRS. AMAYO: They had the children segregated, the Mexican children on one side and the Anglo children on the other. I guess when they go to heaven they're going to have one side for them and one side for us. (Laughter)

Ruiz: Before we get into that, I understand that (sounds like the Holiday, Kansas was the jumping off place for the town's name is Holiday, but Mexicans on the railroad, and then they would I'm not sure) come to Argentine and on. Do you know anything about Holiday, Kansas?

Amayo: Yeah.

Ruiz: What kind of colony was there? large? small?

Amayo: No, it was a real small colony. I'm going to tell you the reason why the railroad dropped people in Holiday. The Anglos and the people over in Argentine at that time had what you call the Klu Klux Klan.

Ruiz: Very popular in the 20's against Mexicans.

Amayo: Now the Klu Klux Klan, were employed, the big officials for the Sante Fe, they were Klux, and they didn't want no Mexicans to come in here to take their jobs. So the dropped the Mexicans in Holiday and they had box-carred the and they bring them four or five at a time over here. Until the KKK fell apart or something. Then they brought the Mexicans in by the car load.

Ruiz: But that was not the railroad center?

Amayo: No, your main railroad center was right here in Argentine. And that was the first step for the Mexicans, because, you see, when the Mexicans came from over there they had juaraches and old white pants and they weren't dressing like a track worker. When I was in my first years in h.s. Dr. Plopper, he was a big Klu Klux Klan man. He went ahead and told me -- in fact I thank him for it, I hope he's in heaven now -- it was him that made me finish up h.s., it was him that pushed me on a lot of things in fact, him and Dr. Fisher. But... they needed some one to interperet those guys over there. They used to pick me up and take me over there to interperet for the Mexicans, make up the papers and dress them, A lot of them didn't want to wear no shoes because they were used to the juaraches(sp?); but in winter time you couldn't wear no juaraches here. So what they did was give them big, heavy socks and put on the old shoes, so they could be comfortable and work on the track. But they brought a few at a time because the KKK used to be here.

Ruiz: They were employed mostly as track layers?

Amayo: That's all. Worked on the track.

Ruiz: What kind of work did you do?

Amayo: I worked hard, man! (LAUGHTER) We started in 1935, that was during the depression. My wife then, me and her was kind of chumming around, making love... (LAUGHTER) My first job was with the Railroad as a water boy, and I would help the time-keeper on the numbers and the names. I was getting 15c an hour. The track worker at that time was getting maybe 200 - 250 an hour. That was low wages. So some of the guys there told me, "Why don't you try to get you a better job than this?" I was going to h.s. So when I finished h.s. the master mechanic there and the others, they were football followers, they followed the Argentine h.s. My last year we beat almost every body in greater K.C. So they used to gamble. They gambled on this game and Vandenberg told me, "Hey, Mexican boy, I want you to win this game!" I said "What's for me if I win the game?"

"Would you like to work for the railroad"

"Yeah!"

"I give you a job."

"Okay." We was playing Rosedale. We went out and won the game using some dirty tricks that we weren't supposed to use. Anyway we won the game. The following summer I was working on the dykes(docks?)for the city and I saw Vandenberg. I said, "Hey, Dutchman, you owe a job!" "oh, yeah, Joe Amayo! I remember you. Come over and I'll put you to work." I'll tell you what a company can do when they want to do it. They didn't have no union, they had guys working three days one week and two the next week. I went to the office and said I want to see

Mr. Vandenberg, and the guy says Mr. Vandenberg doesn't want to see you. I said "Oh yes he does" and Vandenberg says yes come in and he took me to the head timekeeper and said, "I want you to put this man to work." and the timekeeper said, "I can't put this man to work, there's others with seniority ahead of him."

"That don't make any difference, put him to work."

And the Master mechanic, Mr. Nicholson, told him, "Put him to work" So I went to the doctor, had an examination, went back at noon and started working.

Ruiz: Were you a member of the union immediately?

Amayo: There was no union then. The union didn't come in until way later. Oh, they had what they called the company association, and they made me a member right quick. They put me to work and all the guys were mad at me because I was working so hard.

Ruiz: There was no union for Mexicans, or no union for anybody?

Amayo: There was no union for nobody.

Ruiz: In '35?

Amayo: In '35. All they had was the company association. The company ran it. They told what to do, what not to do. And then I started as a laborer. And all the kids that would come in, they would start them up as helpers. And give a little better job. So then myself and two other guys, we went to the master mechanic... and asked why can't we get a better job than just common laborer?

He said, "Well, you have to be a h.s. graduate and an American citizen."

"Is that all you need? I'm an American citizen and I'm a h.s. graduate."

Then they told me I had to get an okay from Chicago. They didn't think we'd go to Chicago. So myself and Thomas Kemper, a colored boy, and I can't remember who else, we went clear up to Chicago and told the man what we wanted. He said, "Why can't they set you up?" We said they told us we had to be h.s. graduates and American citizens, well, we're both.

Amayo (cont.): He said, "I'll call them and you go back there Monday." So we went back and they told us well, we cannot set you up right now because we go by seniority. There are a lot of Mexicans working here 15-20 years that have to be set up. I said all right, I don't want to hurt your rules. If you have to go that way, go ahead. So that's what they started setting up a lot of Mexican people who were there ahead of us. But the machinists gave them a hard time because a lot of them couldn't read and write too well and they were supposed to pick up the work sheets for the machinists and tell them what had to be done...

MILLIE: You said you don't remember exactly when the union was organized. Do you remember details about why it was organized or what started it?

Amayo: Well, the main thing that started it was wages, just like any time a union gets started it's wages and working conditions. You could go to the Santa Fe and you'd work every day, Sundays, no holidays. And a lot of times they would call you 5, 4, 12 o'clock at night and tell you that you had to go in. They'd just pay you straight time. Charlie...Walton, I believe it was, and another guy got together and said we just got to bring the union here because they're working these guys overtime and they got to be paid overtime. And the hospitalization was bad, the working conditions were bad. The railroad had hospitals and doctors for its employees. A lot of the people born in Argentine, the deliveries were accompanied by a doctor because a lot of the Mexican people worked for the railroad. But then they wanted better wages and better conditions so they began to try to organize the A. F. of L.

Millie: Were any Mexicans involved in that struggle?

Amayo: Yes, yes! Let me tell you, after we got in they put me as a helper, and, of course, they gave me the dirtiest job there was; that was cleaning coal-burners from the front end. I was worse than a colored man, every day when I went home I was just black from that dust. But you couldn't refuse a job. Finally, after begging the master mechanic, he said, "We'll give you a job as a brick layer's helper, which was working on the coal-burning locomotives. And, boy, sometimes that thing was hot, red all over and you had to go in there and get it ready for the brick layer so he could lay that brick or stop that leak. You'd, have to go in there when it was still hot and mark the leak with chalk or some kind of paint. After that I begged them and begged them until they said, well you can go to the coach yard but you got to start as a coach cleaner, which was lower than a helper, but it was not too much lower. I knew quite a bit about the mechanical part. I worked in the "pit" where they changed wheels for the streamliners.

MILLIE: Which position were you in when the union was organized? Do you remember off-hand?

Amayo: I was already what they call a mechanic's helper, diesel mechanic's helper. I worked for a man named Paul Ludwig, and we had a Mexican man, Mr. Carmona. He was educated in the old rail roads in Mexico. During the strike, they brought him here to work.

Millie: So there was a strike in order to organize the union?

Amayo: There was a strike in order to bring those two Mexicans over here from over there, to work on the pullmans. After that, we could bid any job if we knew we were qualified. I bid in on what they called the job, working on the pullmans. And I was there when the union come in. Girl, it was hell when the union come in. Until the union was organized. After I got in there coaching then I went out as a car man before that I was on the passenger equipment. And then they closed the coach yard, so they s sent me out to the yards. I worked in the yards until I retired.

MRS AMAYO: Why is our story so unique? I read a story in the paper the other day about the Polish in the packing houses of Amourdale.

Ruiz: Unique because it's never been written about. This way you're going to get some credit.

MRS AMAYO: Have you read the two books written about Argentine?

Ruiz: I've looked at several but none of them ever talk about Mexicans.

MRS AMAYO: That's right.

Ruiz: It was mostly the boosterism or how great the companies were but they never talk about the working stiffs.

Amayo: They weren't too great.

MRS AMAYO: It was supposed to be the most informative book about Argentine and it doesn't have one line about Mexicans.

Ruiz: Exactly. I did read that one.

MRS. AMAYO: The new one is the geology history about Argentine, to which there aren't too many Mexican contributors, and I really don't blame them. I was talking to Don Simmons, he came to the house the other day, and he said "Why haven't too many people contributed?" I said, in the first place, we can't say history like it really was, in your book.

Ruiz: Historians have a nasty habit that unless it's written, it ain't history. But we're saying that oral histories are just as important because if they haven't been written we should collect it. In general history books, the history books that we read in school, Mexicans did not appear in

history books until 1954, three lines. Again in '64—smattering, same author. It hasn't been but in the last ten years that we've gotten interested in the History of Mexicans. Which is to say immigrant histories — we can get into the arguments that we aren't immigrants, that we were here before— that fact is that we are immigrants. The Polish have been written about in Chicago, the Italians in Buffalo, the Irish in Boston, but the Mexicans have never been written about in this country.

MRS. AMAYO: The truth is too harsh, too impolite.

Ruiz: You mean the Mexicans don't want to talk about it?

MRS AMAYO: No, no, the whites.

Amayo: Dr. Ruiz, let me tell you why. The Mexicans didn't have no educated people to write it down. This is nothing new. Like Martin Luther King, he said he had a dream that he would see a negro and a white boy walking hand-in-hand. Now they get married. We never had anybody who had the education and was willing to go to the effort to look up that history, like you people are doing. That's what we want. That's what I want.

Carmen: History is HIS-story. We have to write our story.

Amayo: In those days, we didn't have no kids that went to college. I went two years to Junior College only because I was a hell of a good football player.

Ruiz: Did your family encourage you to go to college?

Amayo: Yes. My stepfather encouraged me very much to go to college and my mother had a good Spanish education. My parents in Los Angeles, they all had good education. My real father, who died, he was a mining engineer. He was a college graduate. He went to southern Calif, university. But I lost him in 19... I don't know if he went to the war... At that time a Mexican husband would leave the family, go to some other place, get killed and the family wouldn't know nothing. They told me that he went to the war. I don't know if he did or not. And at that time, they didn't give a damn if the Mexicans went to war because at that time the veterans organizations weren't organized like they are now. Now we have the group that this boy here belongs to the American Legion Post belongs to The American Legion Post in Argentine they went through hell to get that post going. Not even the 111 want them over there, they had their own post.

Millie: Do you think you could talk a little bit about that?

Mike Sanchez: Would it be alright if I went down this list here? I'm not a good speaker, I only had 8 years of education. I'll do my best. (WORDS UNCLEAR) ...there was no work in Mexico at that time. Conditions in Mexico at that time were poor because they just got through with some revolutions. And the people came mostly by train. And a lot of them sneaked across the river. I was about six months old and they just carried me across the river so I wouldn't drown (LAUGHTER) There was plenty of work because nobody else would do that kind of work. The railroads, all they had working on them was Chinese and Mexicans,

Millie: What kind of work?

Sanchez: They were the ones that built the rail roads. When they first got here, the railroad put them up in box cars. After a time, my folks moved up to a, little colony here in Turner. But these people that came from Mexico were not dumb people. They were carpenters, these houses were built by them. Our house was built by the lumber they got from the boxcars. (WORDS UNCLEAR) ...These people, the first thing they had to do was drill a well. 300 feet sometimes, 'cause I seen them sometimes. My dad would get out there, they would all pull together, help

the other guy build his well. And every two years they'd have to go down there, you know the end of the well there's a point with a lot of perforations on the pipe that gets the sand and dirt out and gets the water out of there. They'd get it out, clean it and put it back there and they'd have water for another couple of years. Everybody had their own well.

Millie What year was that?

Sanchez: As far as I can remember it was about '28.

Mrs. Amayo(?): He's my brother. Our mothers says about 1914, but our father had been here before. He had been here for summer work. By the time they came, he had a job. He worked out of a shanty in Turner, for the Sante Fe maintainence.

Sanchez: Like I say, when they first got here the railroad put them up in boxcars. They had right here by the dyke, they had a big nothing but boxes, where they lived. With time they bought a lot and with railroad lumber they built a house. Kansas City looked just like it does in the westerns I guess at that time. Housing and all that was what they made of it. And social life— I think they did a lot more than they do now. They had dances down there where the railroad tracks are. They had these Indian dances, they had fiestas, cockfight\$ They had people come from all over for these cockfights. It was like a big fiesta.

Ruiz: Did the sheriff look the other way on the cockfights?

group: No, no.

Amayo: He always got a cut.

Sanchez: The Mexicans made the best home brew, so all the hueros used to come down there. (WORDS UNCLEAR) ...showed me how to read or write, and now days you get these young people, they don't even know how to talk Spanish. We used to walk from church...

(THE TAPE ENDS)