Carlos Mariani Rosa
Narrator

Lorena Duarte
Interviewer

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Carlos Mariani Rosa - **CM**
Lorena Duarte - **LD**

LD: It is Monday, July 26, 2010, and I am Lorena Duarte. I will be conducting the interview today with Carlos Mariani. We are here at the offices of the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership.

I just want to say thank you so much. I know you're an incredibly busy person, so on behalf of myself and the Minnesota Historical Society, I just want to say thank you for taking the time to talk to us about Minnesota's Latino community.

First of all, let's start off with your name and how to spell it.

CM: My name is Carlos Mariani Rosa.

LD: And date of birth?

CM: July 13—lucky thirteenth—1957.

LD: Tell me just briefly what you do in your many different roles. [chuckles]

CM: Well, my professional role is I'm a state legislator [District 65b]. I'm a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives. I was first elected in 1990, so I began in the 1991 session. I currently chair the House K-12 Education Policy Committee. Then, in addition to that, I'm the executive director of a nonprofit collaborative called the Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, whose mission is to work for success for Minnesota students of color in our public and private K through 16 schools.

LD: First of all, I'd like to start off by asking where you were born and a little bit about your family, your parents' names and your siblings.

CM: Half the men in my family are named Carlos, so my father's name is Carlos. [chuckles] My son's name is Carlos. I never should have continued the tradition.

My father is Carlos Ramón Mariani from Ponce, Puerto Rico. My mother is Carmen Rosa, Mariani, also from Canovanas, Puerto Rico. I was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the first born. Both my parents migrated from Puerto Rico in the 1950s, actually migrated separately as young people and met here in the States in Michigan. That's where I got my start in this world.

LD: Do you have siblings?

CM: I have two sisters and a brother. Annette, Linola, and Jóse.

LD: Where did you grow up?

CM: I grew up in Chicago. We moved a bit. In Grand Rapids, my dad had actually done field work, agricultural work in the Ohio Valley and up in Michigan, as well. Then, he sort of followed work opportunities around Lake Michigan, and settled in Gary, Indiana, when I was about two or three, working the steel mills for a short period of time. He had a brother in Gary that raised a family there, as well. Then, we moved up into Chicago when I was probably about four or so, and settled in there. I grew up there, graduated from high school there, and came up here to college.

LD: What was Chicago like at the time? What was the neighborhood that you grew up in like?

CM: Chicago was a very violent, racially tense community. My guess is that there are good chunks of Chicago that are that way still. It was during the 1960s and 1970s with a lot of white flight out of the city. We felt that; we saw that, white families moving out in large droves and a lot of expansion of the black community and the growth of Latino communities. There was a lot of almost tribalism in Chicago. When I was a kid, it wasn't so much about white folks or black folks or brown folks; it was about Italians and Germans and Poles and Puerto Ricans and Mexicans. That's how everything broke down. There were neighborhoods connected to each one of those communities. There were cliques and groups and gangs connected to each one of those communities. There were businesses, obviously. There was just a lot of tension…a lot of tension.

When I grew up there, we had one major riot in 1968 when Doctor Martin Luther King was killed. My community was ground zero of that riot.

LD: Where was that, by the way?

CM: It was over on the West Side. Garfield Park is where I lived. As I mentioned, I grew up in a city that was very racially tense. That kind of erupted several times. There was physical violence on a big scale, and in 1968, we had the big riots that went on for days. They burned out part of my neighborhood, and it wound up being occupied by the National Guard and maybe the Army. I remember seeing Army trucks going up and down the streets.

But on the opposite, sort of the flip side of that, the city was also a huge, rich place with lots of people in it. People spoke lots of languages with a lot of racial, ethnic cultures existing in the same space. It wasn't all violence. There was a lot of violence, but there was also a lot of kind of rich stuff that was happening—at least among the younger folks, a lot of sharing and hanging out. So I got accustomed to growing up in a space with racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity even before we knew the word diversity. It was sort of a natural environment. It had its ups and its downs. There was a lot of tension around, but there was also a lot of connecting that was happening at the same time.

LD: Tell me a little bit about your family, how you feel that your parents influenced you, if they did, and if they did, how so in your life or career choices or anything like that.

CM: Yes. I think of the word work when I think of my parents. They were both pretty hard workers, very traditional. Mom actually didn't work outside of the home until I was about, I don't know, eleven or twelve. That was a pretty courageous thing for her to do, because she had to tell my traditional Latino dad she was working outside of the home, and "There isn't much you can do about it."

[laughter]

CM: There was a big fight. I remember that one. Even at home, she worked hard. They were limited in English speaking. They really heavily stressed good work habits, of course. They had us doing that around the home and role modeling that.

But, they also stressed education. That was a really important constant. I was first born, so I remember I was first to go off to school. I didn't speak English very well at the start of school. I remember coming home the first day and Mom asked me what did I learn. I had learned this English word that I thought was pretty cool. It was the word airplane. So I told her, "Airplane." I thought it was pretty cool that I could point to something and say, "That's an airplane." In those first years, basically, my Mom would sit with me every day and go over our readers, you know, those early readers. I always like to say that we kind of learned to read English together.

So their influence was really about family, about work, about getting ahead, about education, in particular. They sort of drilled the work ethic and the value of an education. Which I think was really pretty fortunate because I attended a public school system that, at that time, (it still is, but at that time especially), was one of the most dysfunctional big city school districts. There wasn't a whole lot of learning, if you will, going on in many of the inner city schools. So my parents were kind of a constant driver of reading, in particular, and getting your school work done. I would say that was really the biggest thing that really jumps out for me in terms of their influence in my life.

LD: You attended K through 12 in Chicago?

CM: Yes.

LD: Where did you graduate high school?

CM: I went to Lane Technical High School.

LD: Lane Tech!

CM: Yes. You've heard of it?

LD: Yes.

CM: A lot of people have. [chuckles]

LD: One of my best friends whom I go visit.

CM: No kidding. Okay, a "Laneite." Lane Tech was a special school. It's a big school. There were 5,000 kids at Lane when I was there. It's the size of many small Minnesota cities. It actually had been an all boys' school for, I don't know, fifty years until they got sued in the early 1970s. My class was actually the class that brought the integrated school with women. Yes, it's a huge school. It has a big kind of shadow over Chicago. It's a selective school, so you had to test into the school. But because it was selective, and didn't have a geographic boundary, and because it was also so big, it was also kind of a microcosm of Chicago's youth. We had every race in Chicago pretty much, and from almost every geographic community in the city. It was a great place with lots of opportunities, but, frankly, it was also too big in many ways. So kids like me had a tendency to get lost in a huge setting like that. So, you know, there were ups and downs with it.

LD: After high school, what did you do?

CM: I headed north to Minnesota.

LD: And why Minnesota?

CM: Well, I came here to go college. I think it's an interesting story. I was active in a Lutheran church. I'm actually Lutheran, which is unusual for Puerto Ricans. That was really an accident of geography. We moved into a community when I was about eleven or so and our house, which was our first house—we had lived in apartments the entire time—Pop's first house, was across the street from a Lutheran church. So Mom sent the four of us across the street to get a Christian education. She had always done that for us, but, formally, in terms of a church, we didn't connect with any churches. We didn't grow up in mostly Latino communities when we were little, where you would find Latino speaking, Spanish speaking churches. We grew up in primarily white/black communities, so we were pretty isolated as Puerto Ricans, which was kind of unusual. Most folks kind of would settle in the barrio. So we walked across the street, and they took us in, and we became very active in the Lutheran church.

They had a very strong youth program that actually got me out of the city, camping and interacting with other youth groups from other churches, including other churches from other economic incomes, other classes. So it was my first exposure to that. By the time I was nearing my senior year, I had been very involved in our youth group at the church, and we were very socially aware and conscious, I guess. We were, basically, organizing opportunities for the use of our church building for youth activities. As our community changed, it became increasingly violent. We kind of carved out that space as sort of a safe space, a safe cell, which meant that a number of us on the streets, basically, went out and kind of negotiated with kids that we grew up with who were now members of gangs to create a safe space. We didn't think anything of it back then, you know, but now, as I look back, I'd be a little nervous if I had my kids going out negotiating with gangs.

As a result of that, I caught the eye of a young intern who had graduated from a college up here in Minnesota, Macalester College, and he was a Lutheran in the seminary. The Lutherans, in your last year, will place you as an intern in a congregation. He was placed there in Chicago. I guess I got his attention because of the work that I was doing. I was still at the school. I also had jobs, more than one job. I had a weekend job. I'd clean up a store. I had a summer job, which was a full time gig, if you will. Then, I had an evening job after school in a Japanese-owned photo shop on the North Side of Chicago.

So I was always either working or volunteering or studying. I was constantly a busy person. I guess I got his attention, and he asked me one day what my plans were for college. I told him that I was going to college. He said, "Really? Where are you going?" After a while, it became pretty clear to him that I had no idea how to get to college.

[laughter]

CM: So he offered to write a letter for me to some friends at the college he went to, asking for some advice. He did that. Weeks later, I'm sitting in my—I love telling stories—

LD: This is good.

CM: I'm sitting in—I shouldn't be telling this—a detention hall…

[laughter]

CM: In high school. I don't know what I did wrong; I've forgotten, but I did something. I got called to the front office, and I thought, oh, my god, they caught me again. I'm walking to the front office trying to find out from the messenger, "What do you know? What do you know?" "I don't know anything." I get there and my counselor met me. My counselor, who actually, frankly, barely paid attention to me, said, "There's someone here to visit you from Minnesota."

[laughter]

CM: I kind of knew where Minnesota was, somewhere north, you know. I walked in and there was this gentleman by the name of Mike O'Reilly. Mike introduced himself as a recruiter from Macalester College and started talking to me about the college. After, I don't know how many minutes, I interrupted him. This was just pure street mentality. I interrupted him, and I asked him, "With all due respect, what do you want from me?"

[laughter]

CM: I couldn't figure out the angle.

LD: Right.

CM: I thought maybe I was in trouble. He looked at me. Mike was a pro, you know. He just sort of smiled and said, "You don't have any idea why I'm here, do you?" I said, "No, I don't. I don't know why we're having this conversation." He pulled out a letter, and he said, "Why don't you read this?" So I read this letter, and it's a really cool letter about some kid who is doing all this great stuff. And I thought, "that's pretty cool." Then, I realized the letter was about me.

LD: [laughter]

CM: Then, I read my friend, the intern's, name, John. Then, everything started clicking. Ohhh-kay. Mike gave me an application form and said, "Why don't you fill this out? I'll come back in a couple weeks, and we'll see how you're doing with it, and we'll take to from there. Okay? This man thinks highly of you and you're graduating from school. I think we might be interested in having you come to school here." So I thanked him, and, then, I left and walked back to whatever class it was. Halfway back, what happened is the application wound up in the garbage can.

LD: Ohhh!

CM: I felt that there was just no way those things happened to people like me, you know, a private college, away. It sounded like a really cool place, away in Minnesota, expensive, and with really smart kids. I just wasn't going to set myself up for it, frankly. I was sort of protecting myself, I guess. So I chucked it and, then, forgot about it.

Two weeks later, I was sitting in class, and I got called to the front office. I walked in the front office, and there's my counselor again. He said, "Mr. O'Reilly is here to see you again." I looked over and there was Mike, and I had these two feelings at the same time. One was that I was terrified, you know. What am I going to tell this guy? That I threw away the application…this and that? So I was just terrified about it. How am I going to get out of this one? But, then, at the same time, I had this other feeling, like, he came back.

He actually came back. So, for the first time, it was sort of like something happened, something got lit. Now, it's like this person really wants you. He believes in you. He sees

something in you. So I had these mixed feelings about this whole thing. It was sort of joy and fear at the same time. [chuckles] Mike said, "Well, how are you doing, Carlos? I told you I'd come back. I'm back. Just wondering how you're doing with the application. Do you need help with it?" I just started "Well, I kind of started on it. I made some mistakes." I don't know. I just started running a bunch of stuff on him.

LD: [laughter]

CM: Mike, who really was a pro, sort of gave me that Mike smile from so many years in the business. I learned that it meant that he knew something. He says, "Yes, well, I thought so." He reaches in his briefcase and pulls out another application and says, "Why don't we fill it out together?"

[laughter]

CM: So that's what we did. We sat there and we filled out the application together. The conversations after that became very serious for me. It's like this really could happen, just because he came back, not because someone gave me a form or anything like that. It was because he came back.

The only thing that was left was to get my parents' signature. And that's the other story - going home to get my parents' signature on it. I'm all excited. I'm high about it. Wow. I'm seeing myself going off in the world and all that. After dinner, you know, I told my dad. I talked to him. My dad was a very formal, strict guy, a hardworking guy, who worked in a factory on the South Side. I said, "Hey, Pop, I want to show you something." So I showed him this. He said, "What is this?" I said, "This is an application for college in a place called Minnesota."

[laughter]

CM: "It's not that far, Pop. It's four hundred miles." I told him that this guy wants me to go to school there. My dad looked at the paper and he looked at me. He just had this sad look on his face. He said, "You know, son, I thought you would stay home instead of going away to college. You can stay here. You can have a place here. It won't be so expensive. These colleges, they lie." So he, basically, just said, "I'm not going to sign this. You can stay here." Later on—I was terribly upset—I learned that's actually a very common thing and certainly a very common thing for immigrant families and for Latino families. You know, I was breaking up a family. I didn't know that then. I was disappointed. So, then, I slid right back into the pre-O'Reilly visits. You know you idiot. You set yourself up; you really did. I crumbled the papers up and threw them under the kitchen table and sat down and felt sorry for myself. [chuckles] I was very disappointed.

A couple hours later, my mom comes down, and she's whispering. She says, "Where's the papers?" I looked at her, and I knew immediately what she was going to do. I said, "Mom, you can't sign those papers." Again, it was a traditional house. Dad hadn't signed it. My god, we'd both get killed.

[laughter]

CM: "You're not going to sign those papers." "Your dad's asleep. He doesn't need to know. I'm going to sign the papers." I said, "Mom, do you really want to do this?" She said, "Give me the papers." I gave her the papers, smoothed it out. She said, "Your dad's a good man, but he just doesn't always know what's best. My son has an opportunity to go to college, and he's going to go." So, she signed the papers. I actually was happy again. [laughter] We both agreed we'd just keep it from dad. 'Let's just not say anything to your father, you know.'

LD: Because, at this point, you weren't sure about it.

CM: Well, you know, we're getting accepted. So, sure enough, a few months later, or whatever it was, I got accepted. I told my mom, and she said, "How are we going to tell your dad?" I said, "You know, Mom, why don't we wait, put it off? Why don't we wait? It costs money, and the next, they're going to tell me is that I'll have to find some money for me to go, so why don't we wait?"

A little later, I filled out the forms, financial aid forms, and, a little while later, I get a letter from the college and a very nice scholarship and there were some loans, I could take out. So, then, I waited for dinner again and went to my dad and said, "Pop, remember that college I talked to you about that wanted me to go to school there?" He looks at me, and I could see he was already starting to get pissed off.

[laughter]

CM: Before he could say anything, I shoved the financial aid papers in front of him and said, "Look, they gave me a lot of money to go to school there." He looked at the paper, and he looked at the paper, looked at the paper. It's like this lasted forever. Finally, he says, "Do you mind if I keep these papers?" I go, "No." He said, "Okay. I'll give them back to you later." I actually learned later why he wanted the papers.

I'd been a year at Macalester, and I got a job for the summer at the factory where Pop worked. It was a big, big factory on the South Side. It was the world's biggest bakery, at one time, Nabisco. It's the kind of place where you have to go and change your clothes, put on uniforms. They have these big lockers. I'm in a locker room, and there's a group of Latinos, gentlemen about my dad's age, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans. They come over and go, "*Hola*. You're Carlos. You're Carlos' son." I go, "Yes." "You're the one who's in college, right?" I go, "Yes." "Well, what are you doing here?" "Just working to make some money. I'm going back." "Well, that's good." Then we sat down and, finally, one of them says, "You know, your dad was the biggest pain in the ass when you got that letter about all the money you got for college. He walked around the whole damn factory showing off this letter about how much money you got."

[laughter]

CM: I didn't even know that. He didn't even tell me this, you know. So there you go.

So that's how I wound up coming up here. To me, it's actually a really important story. To me it's a story about the importance of just being present with other people, really almost intrusively present with other folks. What it really means is how you look out for one another and especially how you look out for the younger folks,

LD: Yes.

CM: And creating opportunities, not assuming you have fun times now. You have to walk your talk, especially walk your talk with younger folks. You have to show them. 'Represent' is what they say now. You have to be almost very aggressive and assertive laying out opportunities for folks and really encouraging them. So Mike did that with me. Then, there's always…I'm a Latino. There's always room for angels. So my mother coming down in the middle of the night…totally like the wild card in the whole scenario. Everything else is by the book, you know. I'm the street kid, acting like a street kid. Mike's the recruiter. Pop's the traditional dad. Mom just comes in, and she's very clear about her values and that judgment was all about us. She's the one that makes it happen.

LD: That speaks a lot to your work here.

CM: Yes, it's part of my passion and my energy. Now, we are here at the Capitol, as well.

LD: Which we'll get to. [chuckles] When did you come to Minnesota?

CM: It was 1975.

LD: What were your first memories of Minnesota?

CM: It was hot and humid and a lot of mosquitoes. Actually, one of my very first memories was of Minnehaha Falls. [chuckles] We had an orientation session just for Latino students. My counselor had a very mature program; mature for its time, as well. They had structured a week-long series of orientations for Latino students. Most of whom were Puerto Ricans or Mexicans. They were diversifying with all the Salvadorians and Cubans and international students. Yes, my earliest memories of that were hanging out at the Hispanic House where it was all Latino students, older students, and eating rice and beans and tortillas. As a Puerto Rican, I missed my friends. But it really it was all about missing being in Chicago in this multicultural mix. So this new experience began to open up the fact that I was part of a bigger community of folks that had come from far away. They took us on a little tour of Minnehaha Falls, just to show us something. Actually, we did this with the black students and the Indian students as well. I remember running all over the falls and some of us went behind the falls. You can't do that now, because they've kind of marked it off limits. There was a little ledge where we walked behind the falls. I always tell my kids, "Hey, I walked behind that falls. Don't you try that!"

LD: [laughter]

CM: Beyond that, it was also an adjustment. Like anyone else, I think it was the sense of being out of place. You get discombobulated. It's a different place. This isn't Chicago. [chuckles] Minnesota is a pretty homogeneously, culturally white state, even now. But in 1975? It was much more so. So that was one of my first impressions, just how weird that was. For me, normal was black, brown, Spanish, German, Polish, Korean, Japanese, etcetera. You had to really look hard to find that here. Psychologically, it was very difficult.

That first semester, any opportunity I could get to go back to Chicago, I'd go, just for a weekend. I learned to look for the rides boards over at the University of Minnesota on campus. I'd bum rides from other college kids who were driving down and driving back…any opportunity—but I always came back. I had obligations at school. But, I almost didn't come back. I just felt totally like a fish out of water.

Then, it was really *fricking* cold.

[laughter]

CM: And I grew up in Chicago where it was cold, but this was colder than anything I'd ever seen before. And I'd never seen so much snow in my life, either. It was both pretty and pretty harsh. [chuckles] Yes, so the natural beauty, the weather, the climate, and the lack of diversity were part of that early experience. But, then there was also, this beginning to connect with a broader group of people beyond my neighborhood, beyond my city.

LD: You finished in 1979-1980, around there?

CM: I was supposed to graduate in 1979. I signed up for the five-year plan.

LD: [chuckles]

CM: I took a year off. I was not doing well academically. I think I probably had, at best, a C average after two years. So I knew I needed to take some time off.

So I went traveling. I traveled throughout the Midwest, down into the South. I actually worked in Oklahoma and Arkansas of all places. I actually ran into Puerto Ricans there, a lot of Indians, a lot of rural whites, rural blacks. I had a girlfriend, truth be told, and that's why I went down there. I actually lived in cities and lived in rural parts. I remember doing a lot of driving. I remember sleeping on lots of floors of friends in their houses for weeks. I was homeless, I guess, technically.

[chuckles]

CM: But I was young, you know, what the hell? After about a year of that, I came back. I was ready and was pretty much a straight A student after that. I was just a little bit more mature.

So, yes, 1980 is when I walked with Manuel Calderon.

LD: Oh, my gosh, my cousin.

CM: Yes. In fact, I was just talking about Manuel this weekend when I came across a picture of… No, I know what it was. I was making some hors d'oeuvres.

LD: Yes.

CM: [unclear] in our memory. I don't know what [unclear] is. It's avocado, a little chicken, a little lemon and salt, [unclear], and you're done.

LD: Oh, my gosh. What a small world.

CM: Yes.

LD: Wow.

CM: It is a small world, isn't it?

LD: It is. I didn't know that you had graduated with him.

CM: Yes. Yes.

LD: You'll be happy to know his kids are doing really well.

CM: Well, they're both in college.

LD: Yes, they've both graduated.

CM: They've both graduated!

LD: I know. Doesn't time fly? But they're doing really well.

CM: Are they? Good. Are they still here in town?

LD: His daughter lives in San Francisco.

CM: Wow.

LD: His son just graduated from [the College of] Saint Ben's [Benedict, Saint Joseph, Minnesota].

CM: Okay.

LD: Funny, anyway, since you knew him.

CM: Good memories. Manuel was one of my best friends in college, frankly. We played tennis together constantly and basketball together.

LD: I didn't know that.

CM: Oh, god, yes. I hung out with Armando, too, his older brother.

LD: Yes, yes.

CM: Manuel was really more my buddy. We'd go up north every once in a while and stay in cabins with friends. Oh, yes, I have a picture of Manuel in a cabin up north.

LD: [chuckles]

CM: He was very young, you know, because he went to college very young.

LD: Yes.

CM: He was brilliant. He was just a good soul. I miss him.

LD: Well, let's see. After you graduated, what did you do then?

CM: I went to law school and survived a year.

LD: Where did you go?

CM: I went to the University of Minnesota. I took a leave and never went back.

LD: How come?

CM: A couple reasons. It wasn't that I wasn't getting it. I just wasn't getting it like in my heart in terms of lawyer-ing.

LD: Sure.

CM: Basically, I just wanted to get out and live. Then, I met my wife, Maritza. Actually, I met her my last year of college. She was great. She supported me and wanted me to finish law school. I took the break and went and worked for lawyers doing the street level work, you know, criminal defense for the Neighborhood Justice Center, a terrific outfit. They really are. I think they're a Minnesota institution, a small outfit that was created as a nonprofit to provide representation for mostly people of color, though not exclusively,

and responding to the fact that in our state, like other states, if you're poor and a person of color, you probably didn't get a fair due process in court. They were set up specifically for that.

I worked with some really great people. Isabel Gomez, who, later, became a judge, is the main person. I worked with Sal Rosas just before he became a judge. Steve Cooper, who's one of the best, if not the best, criminal defense lawyers in the state. Remarkable people. But, after about a year or two, working with lawyers, I realized I didn't want to be a lawyer—at least not then.

LD: Yes.

CM: Then my wife and I decided to get married. We started a family, and one thing led to another, and I looked for another job. I just got farther and farther away from law school.

LD: What did call you?

CM: You know. I don't know if I have an answer for that.

[laughter]

LD: Well, how about this? An easier question: what did you do next?

CM: Well, I think what called in a way was just being a public servant. I wasn't called by money. I have some regrets about that now. [chuckles] Or even more academic pursuits. I just wanted to be out in the mix, you know. I just wanted to be out there.

So I was working with the Neighborhood Justice Center, which was, by the way, an unusual job. All my jobs have kind of been unusual. It wasn't just court work, which we did, and interacting with the clients and taking depositions and all that stuff. There was also an education component to it and, also, a bit of organizing.

Remember, this is the early 1980s. We had a couple of big waves, demographic waves that hit Minnesota in that period of time. We had the Marielitos, the prisoners that were released from Cuba by the tens of thousands by Fidel [Castro] that was known as the Mariel boatlift. Like any immigrant groups, people very quickly were struggling with being here and making the adjustment. At the Neighborhood Justice Center, I got to interact with the worst element of that. [chuckles] Which, by the way, Manuel did, too. He was a guard over at Fort McCoy [Wisconsin] one summer. I don't know if you knew that.

LD: I did not know that. I'm learning things about my own family here.

CM: It was *really* good money. In fact, I was going to join him, and I got sick as a dog whenever that was, May or June. I just came down being sick. Oh, I'll join you when I

get better, and it took me weeks, and, by then, I already had another job. Manuel served. He was deputized, like a Federal marshal, and worked at Fort McCoy as a guard.

LD: Oh, my gosh.

CM: They wanted Spanish-speaking people because all the Marielitos spoke Spanish and only Spanish. So Manuel probably worked there for half a summer and saw some really horrible stuff. There were a lot of bad things. Most of the Marielitos were just regular people, but there was an element where Fidel, basically, did empty out his prisons and his mental health institutions. So there were some really disturbed and some really bad folks. Manuel interacted with them as a guard.

LD: Wow.

CM: He had to be a tough guy, carry a baton. He had to use it, all that kind of stuff. He told me some really scary stories that he said he'd seen and had heard about.

At the Neighborhood Justice Center, we interacted with the criminal element of that group. Some of these were really bad guys. They already started running drugs from Miami to here and back. Some, you know, actually most, were just young guys, mostly guys. They were young guys. They didn't speak English. They didn't know how to make a living. They'd come from broken families in Cuba or whatever, and they got themselves in all sorts of dumb little things that interacted with the courts. So we defended them. We actually did a pretty damn good job of that. A lot of them grew up later, and I don't know whatever happened to them. The Marielitos were a big group.

Then, the Hmong began coming in really large numbers at that time. So we interacted with the Hmong, as well. There it had less to do with criminal issues and more to do with civil issues. [chuckles] You'll understand why I'm laughing. We set up a series of educational seminars and we published, I'm willing to bet, the state's first series of "How to" books in Hmong.

LD: Hmmm.

CM: There was never any need to do this before. We did it in Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Spanish, and English. My job was to go out and do workshops on these issues. The issues all really had to do with civil law, the marriage laws of the United States. Yes, it's true that it's against the law to marry your first cousin.

[laughter]

CM: Well, why is that? Yes, it's true you need to have something called a license to drive a car. Yes, it's true you need to have a license to catch fish, and you can only catch so many fish. I always thought these Asians just thought it was hilarious. Why so many fish?

[laughter]

CM: I would go out and do these workshops. There was a Hmong colleague who was probably one of the first kind of professionally employed Hmong in the state. He was Yang Yang. Yang was actually a very well educated person. He had studied in Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and France, so he spoke Hmong. He was Hmong. He spoke Laotian, a little bit of Cambodian, Thai, no Vietnamese but good French and English.

LD: Wow.

CM: Six languages this fellow spoke. He and I would go out and do these workshops. I would lead the workshops and I would, basically speak English. Then, Yang would do interpret , depending on the groups. We'd do a session, and there were like [unclear], usually [unclear], some Mexicanos. We'd say it in Spanish. Meanwhile, Yang was repeating everything in Hmong, and, then, Laotian or whatever. It was just hilarious.

LD: [chuckles]

CM: But there was a real big need for that. Our sessions were always packed. We did it mostly through the adult basic education programs in our schools.

So, my work involved all the legal stuff. Some of the work was actually kind of dangerous, but I was young and I didn't care. I'd go and track down people in some of the seediest bars in the Twin Cities, you know, just to get the depositions. Later on, I realized I could have gotten killed for that. I'd go into jails and talk to them. Well, people don't want to talk to you in jail.

Then, we did this education work as well.

We also did some organizing work. In the early 1980s, there were still a lot of really bad things that were happening in certain communities with the Saint Paul Police Department. It was probably in every police department, but we only worked in Saint Paul. We had incidents of black young people getting the hell beat out of them by the cops and it happened to Mexicanos, Chicanos on the West Side. We, finally, had a major incident that blew up on Concord Street, and we had a restaurant owner who got beat up by a cop. He had stepped out to find out what was going on, and the cop just picked on him and, the first thing you know, he was headed for the hospital. So I took his deposition.

We, basically, organized with the African American community, because I knew people over in Frogtown. Together, we organized a series of community gatherings where we invited the police chief and other elected officials. That was really my first interaction with politics, to just come and take testimony from people in the communities who were experiencing difficulties with the police. That actually resulted in, eventually, working with the Spanish Speaking Affairs Council. We actually had a Federal Justice Department investigator come out and do an investigation of practices in the community

with the Saint Paul police. Then, they came out with a series of recommendations for the police to build better relationships with these communities.

All three elements were there. It was directing the work and educational work and organizing the work. I mention it because, for me, it's always been about not one discipline, if you will, but sort of a multi-dimensional approach to the work I do. To this day, I have a strong value for advocacy, for education, the opportunity to learn about things, and a responsibility to convey that, and, then, for the power and the strength of organizing. Everything we do whether in the Legislature. People don't think of a legislator as an organizer. Anywhere you're at, in my mind, you have an opportunity to organize, and, frankly, it's smart to organize because no work that's important really can be done by yourself. So, by definition, this will be done with others, which means you should develop good and different ways to build relationships with others in organizing around an agenda. Those were very much formative years for me at the Neighborhood Justice Center.

After that, I took a job with Ramsey Action Programs, a community action anti-poverty program. There I was an organizer. That was my job - to organize. By then, I've got two kids, and we still can barely make enough money to pay rent. There, we did some really good stuff. We actually built a food co-op that lasted for a couple years over on the West Side. We did a lot of organizing around that.

We organized and continued to interact with local elected officials around housing issues. We were part of a group that pushed for fair housing ordinances in the city, particularly for replacement housing. The mid 1980s was a period of time in both Minneapolis and Saint Paul where they were ripping down very affordable housing in the downtown areas basically, single room occupancy units. We used to have hundreds and hundreds of those units, even right here in Saint Paul. Basically those units were for people who were making minimum wages or less, and folks who had illnesses and all sorts of other problems. Those are very rare now, unless it's public housing. Now it is all private market stuff. That's sort of part of –quote/unquote—revitalizing cities. We were ripping down those old units and building up more expensive housing and retail and commercial. We worked with a young city councilman, a guy by the name Jim Scheibel, to craft and advocate for and pass a replacement housing ordinance, which, eventually, became just a good blueprint for other locales and influenced state housing policies, as well. Jim, later, of course, became mayor of Saint Paul. That was very much my mix at that time.

Then, by the later 1980s, I left to take a job at the Minnesota Council of Churches. That was my first statewide job. Now, the platform is bigger. I started out very community specific, racially, ethnic specific, and branched out into more city and countywide work. This one really was a statewide job, which meant I traveled the state. I had already traveled the state as a young guy because I'd worked for the Department of Transportation when I was there as a college kid. Anyway, geographically, I knew the state as a young guy.

LD: Yes.

CM: But, now, I was able to travel the state in a professional way, connecting with ecumenical communities and working on social justice policies. So that's where a lot of things began to gel in terms of looking at big models of what other frameworks could be for social justice and how would it play itself out in different issues and different communities.

The mid 1980s through the early 1990s was a time of huge stress in Minnesota in agriculture. We were losing family farms at a huge rate. It had to do with the markets, at that time, and sort of finance bubbles that were collapsing, not unlike what's happening now with mortgage foreclosures. People just mortgaged themselves as farmers; they were encouraged to do so. Then, when the markets went south, their loans got called in, and they just couldn't keep up. So we were losing hundreds and hundreds of family farms, even thousands—I don't remember the scale. but it was big—across the state. These were small farms.

So the Council of Churches, since we were comprised of denominations that had churches all over the state, was charged with developing policies for the church in terms of how it would respond with pastoral care to that kind of stress and tension, which was both personal on the part of individuals and their families, but also communities. It began to rip apart communities, particularly smaller communities. So we traveled around the state and worked with some really fantastic folks like Anne Kanten. She was actually the deputy commissioner of Agriculture afterwards. Ann basically took our experience, and it became part of bigger movement for a policy at the state level to respond to the financial and physical needs of farmers across the state. Out of that came a number of policies in the 1980s: a very affordable farm loan program for farmers, assistance programs, grant programs for farmers and for organizations looking out for farmers. We were part of the collaboration that pushed those policies forward.

We had the AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome] epidemic that became part of our regular lexicon as a people in the 1980s. Also, part of our work was to provide education around busting the myths of AIDS. People were scared. Religious communities…there was a dominant tendency to think of it as sort of, you know, punishment for being gay. So we were dealing with those issues, crafting tools for people to have discussions and explore and look at what a gospel-centered interpretation was of the disease and the fact that it impacts gay and lesbian people in large numbers, but also other folks, you know.

LD: Yes.

CM: IV [intravenous] users, etcetera. There was a lot of sort of educational work, developing tools to help people have dialog as community members - all focused on justice, focused on the gospel in response to any one of these issues.

I originally was recruited to work on Hispanic ministry at the Council of Churches, and then branched into the other areas. The Hispanic ministry is actually an old ministry, which really is kind of an untold story in Minnesota.

With the Council, it goes back to at least the 1940s, because we had Latino, Spanish speaking migrant workers, Mexicans for the most part, but Bahamians, too, by the way. We used to have a big Bahamian migration. In fact, I met an elderly Bahamian once, because my sister-in-law is Bahamian.

LD: Bahamian from the Bahamas, not Bohemian from Europe?

CM: No, no. The Bahamas.

LD: Okay. [chuckles]

CM: Anyway, the Council of Churches had an old ministry that went back at least to the 1940s. Somewhere at home I have wonderful pictures of this ministry. Basically, it was just a caring ministry. They would do a lot of assistance for people, with basic goods, foods, and clothing. Shelter was tougher, and education also was tough, because, you know, families would travel and these kids would not be in school, and the public schools didn't want them. They didn't have any obligation. This was before all the federal acts provided resources and a mandate for education for these migrant kids. So the churches just did it. They set up schools in church basements all over Minnesota. As you know, families would come and spend a month and then move on to somewhere else. But for a month, they would get some access to educational services. By the time I took over and went to the Council, all that work had become part of federally subsidized grant programs.

So our work had to deal with continuing to help close the divide, the cultural divide between Anglos, particularly in rural Minnesota, and Latinos. I basically traveled the state and just interacted with both communities. After a while, people just assumed I was a minister. [chuckles]

I was invited out to Willmar once at a Methodist church. The minister said, "I'd like you to speak at the service on Sunday and tell us about Latinos and Hispanics, and racial justice." I agreed, and drove out early, got there, and walked into the minister's office and sat down. I said, "Tell me how it's going to go." After a while, it became clear to me that he thought I was a minister.

LD: [laughter]

CM: And I thought I was going to go up just to say a few words. He wanted me to give the sermon.

LD: Oh!

CM: I said, "You know I'm not a minister." He just didn't know. He had not prepared a sermon.

[laughter]

CM: He said, "What are we going to do?" I said, "All right. Let me see your Bible." Literally, in thirty minutes, I drafted my first and only sermon with references to biblical passages that I was aware of. I had my message, the whole bit and got up and gave my sermon at this Methodist church. Afterwards, the minister said, "I never would have guessed you weren't a minister if you hadn't told me."

An interesting thing happened in the minister's office afterwards. Basically, what I did, I got up and talked about the wholeness of humanity and the oneness of the body of Christ— that's the metaphor. We can't afford to be separated. We need to interact. People ought to interact. We have a lot in common. We're all part of the creation. We all would like to be saved, all that stuff. So, afterwards, I was in the minister's office laughing a little bit. One of the matriarchs of the community came in. This was like right out of movies. This was an older woman. She was probably in her seventies. She came in and she was pretty well dressed, you know. You can kind of tell in places like that, because most white folks aren't really well dressed, so when you see one, it's like she's got some money.

So she walked in like she owns the place, you know. It was pretty clear. She had a very stern look on her face. I looked at the minister in the eye. You could see it on his face, like, oh, my god. I picked up all the cues. She just walked right in; there was no "Excuse me." She just walked in like she owned the place. I reintroduced myself. I actually [unclear]. I think the minister maybe did. She looked at me and she said, "I just have one question." "Yes, ma'm." I was very polite. She said, "Why do we have to tolerate bad behavior? These Mexicanos, they make noise. They drink in the park. They come and go. They stay up late," and on and on.

I looked at her and I said, "Well, ma'm, no one should have to tolerate bad behavior from anyone, whether they're Mexican or white or a black person, or anyone. You have a right to a peaceful community and that should be true for everyone." "Well! Yes, but, but, but, these folks. Things have never been the same." and she went on and on. I didn't want to get into this deep argument, because I could see the minister was really worried, you know. I didn't want to get him in trouble. I just basically left it, "Well, you do have a right to a peaceful community. You should expect that behavior out of everyone." I remember telling her, "I'm sure, ma'am, that you had crime in this city before Mexicans came." I think I even pulled out a specific case, showing that most criminals in our society are white males. She wasn't happy.

[laughter]

CM: So I would do a lot of that. I would travel around. It was fun, but it was also a bit of burden trying to educate Anglos who think they're well educated, and they're not.

LD: Right.

CM: They think they're sophisticated and they're not, and, then, trying to do that with a sense of humility, because it isn't about bringing them down, but it's about educating them that our people are pretty sophisticated, too.

LD: Yes.

CM: I remember, one time, I was in a Lutheran church, and a nice enough guy came over. He said, "You know, Carlos"—he was educated, by the way—"I try to work with the Mexicans. I think they're just intimidated by me." I said, "Oh, really? Why?" "Well, you know, they see me in my suit." He has a suit, the authority and this and that. I had this evil thought. I remember thinking that's got to be one of the cheapest suits.

[laughter]

CM: I would *never* wear a suit like that. Let me show you some suits, brother.

[laughter]

CM: I'm like, oh, Carlos, stop, stop. Listen to the brother. It was just a total misperception, a total misread, but also a total misread of himself. Usually when you're misreading people, you're also misreading yourself.

LD: Yes.

CM: So I did that for a number of years. I organized the first—I'm pretty sure it was the first—what we called the Hispanic Directors Association. The Hispanic Directors Association was a collaborative that brought together folks who were head of Latino non-profits. Back then, you could count them. Now, there's many, many more. At that time there weren't more than half a dozen.

That's where we started exploring the concept of collaborative work, the power of collaboration. It became real clear to me that this sort of tribalism, if you will, as a broad metaphor was still a pretty powerful, dynamic thing, even as small and powerless as we were. I got mine! I got my United Way grant and so I don't need to work with you. What I did, since I didn't compete with any of them for funds, was just create a table where we could do things together and explore doing things together.

One of the bigger things that we did together then was with NIH, National Institutes for Health, which is a major federal funding agency for health care across the country. They were responding to the AIDS epidemic. So they contacted the Minnesota Department of Health and said, "We have grant programs for communities of color. We need people of color. We know that the prevalence of AIDS infection is very high in communities of color. We want the department to craft a sub grant, co-grant, something out of these

communities, and respond to them." José Trejo was the director of the Spanish Speaking Affairs Council. I hadn't seen him in years. He called me up and says, "Carlos, the Department of Health has this meeting to talk about these grants." I didn't know this. "They've already issued the RFPs [Request for Proposal], and they're going to review the proposals and then pick. So we want a couple Latinos to come." Basically, they wanted us to rubber stamp their decision.

I said, "Well, José, it sounds like it's your job, man." He said, "It is, except I already have history with them. They already know. I think we need a fresh face, someone they'll pay attention to. You're not in the field or the provider, or anything like that. Plus, you know, you've got the Hispanic Directors' Association to back you up." I said, "Okay, I'll do it." So I go to the meeting. I'm this young cat. I've never been to anything like this. I go to the Department of Health. Mike Osterholm was the guy in charge. Mike's really a good guy. He's nationally, known as a public health expert. The guy is brilliant. But Mike and I did not get along that day. It was my first time ever meeting with Mike. They had this choreography. They choreographed this whole process. They had like two or three blacks there, two or three whites there, two or three Indians there, and they walked through development process. They said they had got six responses and had nailed it down to two and were recommending this one, you know. Right? Sign here.

LD: [laughter]

CM: So they did the African American one first if I remember right, and, then, the Latino. Oh, the ones who could only sign off were the people from the communities, right? I want to say I might have been the only one there, the only Latino who actually showed up. [chuckles]

LD: Oh, my gosh.

CM: So it all rested on me, you know. What the hell did I know about public health? So they went through the dog and pony show. "These people, well, the Latino community, boy, we just didn't get very many responses. So we're recommending this." The "this" was—this was a while ago—basically, a University of Minnesota researcher, a white guy. By, then, I had actually called some of the organizations up and asked them for advice, like CLUES [Chicanos Latinos Unidos En Servicio] about what they would do. There's still some of this that goes on, by the way, nowadays, because we don't still have the social capital that we should have as a people.

LD: Yes.

CM: This was all about social capital. This is about who knows who. You can call it the good old boys network. Whatever you call it, it's about who knows who.

LD: Yes.

CM: We knew that what would happen is that some white guy would get the grant, and, then, he would call up someone that they befriended, that they know, that works for CLUES, or whatever, and ask you to come in and look over stuff and offer some advice - or sit on their advisory committee. That's a favorite tactic, you know.

LD: [chuckles]

CM: Of course, none of this is for pay.

LD: Right.

CM: They're getting a grant; they're getting paid. They're not going to offer…or if they do, it's lunch, or a little daily stipend for the hassle. This is very rampant; it still does happen. It's a little more sophisticated now in how it happens, but it still happens. So that was their recommendation, to give the grant to a professor over at the University of Minnesota. "What do you think, Carlos?" Mike Osterholm [said]. I didn't know how to be polite about it, because I'm actually a little pissed. I said, "Well. No."

[chuckles]

CM: He said, What do you mean 'No?'" I said, "He's not a Latino, so I don't like the organization. No. You can do better." He said, "We can't do better. No one else responded. There's no capacity out there." I said, "How do you know that?" "Because we put out the RFP." "Who did you send the RFP to?" "Well, we put it out publicly." I said, "You know what? I work for the Hispanic Ministry. I never saw the RFP. And, by the way, I called so and so, and they didn't know anything about it." He said, "That may very well be, Carlos, but you've got to have the capacity to do this." I said, "We have people with capacity." "Not like these folks." "Yes, we do. We have people with research backgrounds, higher ed backgrounds, policy background. We have them." "Well, who are they?" I said, "Well, I'm not going to tell you. You're going to have to put out the proposal again." So then Mike gets pissed, and he says, "Well, Carlos, we can't." "Why not?" "Because the NIH gave us a deadline and they already gave us the money, and we'll have to give it back." I said, "Well, that's not my problem, is it?" [chuckles] I'm being a hard ass, you know.

Mike then pulls the ultimate maneuver. He said, "So you're telling me, Mr. Mariani, that you would rather send money back and not have it help out your community. You'd rather have that and we just do nothing?" I said, "Well, you know what? That wasn't my choice. That was your choice. Here's what I'm telling you. I would rather send money back than to pretend that we're using money to help my community and, yet, it doesn't help my community at all. That's all." I was done with the conversation. So I left. I said, "Here's some names of people. If you want to follow up on this. Talk to these people and bring me back. Well, they never brought me back." They didn't want to deal with me, but they did reissue the RFP.

Do you know about the grant? Victoria Amaris. Do you know Victoria?

LD: The name is very familiar.

CM: Victoria Amaris had just moved back from Chicago with a public health background, a master's degree, and had done research. She understands data, and data analysis, and understands program delivery. These are the people that Mike and all the experts in public health said didn't exist in our community. So I called the HDA, the Hispanic Director's Association, and I said, "They're going to reissue the RFP. Let's put in a proposal, but, damn it, let's do it together. Let it be a collaborative proposal, but we need a researcher. Someone has got to know someone." I had never met Victoria. I don't know who it was that came up with her. They said, "There's Victoria Amaris." So we met Victoria and we fell in love with her. She's terrific, a wonderful woman. We put together a proposal.

Years later, when I'm sitting as a State Legislator, I got a call from the Department of Health. It wasn't Mike, but it was someone working there. They asked,"You were involved with the Hispanic Director's Association, with the Latino community." I forget what they called the AIDS project. I told him, "Yes." He said, "Well, we need your help."

[laughter]

CM: I said, "What's the problem?" Well, it was a little issue that they had. What had happened was that RFP was *so* successful. It was so well done, because Victoria knows her stuff. She knows how to do stuff well, very professional. Plus it was a collaborative. Nobody else had done collaborative stuff. Other communities were fighting among themselves for it. We *would* have been fighting for it.

[laughter]

CM: That was our natural tendency, too, you know, but we did it collaboratively. So what it meant was that they were staff in CLUES. They were dividing up the work, putting on workshops. CLUES had the mental health experts. Someone else - La Clinica - had the physical health and medical health experts. It was such a powerful model that the Department of Health got an award from NIH.

LD: [laughter]

CM: Yes! The award that I got them. That they never thanked me for, by the way. But they've been invited to national conferences to share this model of collaboration. We were delivering outreach services in AIDS prevention using a collaborative model. So the Department of Health gets all the credit for all this stuff, and they, you know, would bring the CLUES staff along and whatever to go to the national conference.

Anyway, years later, they called me back, because it was all falling apart because of something. I can't remember. So I intervened again and they kept it going for a little while longer. I don't think the program is now sustained.

Those were my formative years. This is where all this stuff starting to come together for me. It's about, now, working the system statewide. There's always a need for advocacy. No matter how far up you go, it's still the same game. It's the same game here, same game everywhere, the same psychology, the same patronizing stuff. It's the same lack of humility and the way race plays into everything. So that continued.

Then, the final big thing that I did over at the Council was the… Oh, god, this is so long ago. I think it was the National Council of Churches that had a grant program for immigration work. This was 1986. [President] Ronald Reagan had just signed the IRCA, the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986, which was the biggest immigration reform effort to that point reaching all the way back for, probably, twenty years. The late 1960s, the early 1970s, was the last time they had done a major change. It really makes me laugh, because, by then, we have like a million undocumented people in the United States. That was a big deal. So we've got to have immigration reform. Ronald Reagan, a Republican, actually signed a decent immigration reform bill

LD: Yes.

CM: But there was a catch to it. [chuckles] Well, there were several, but one of the catches was that you had to pay to play. It was per person, so if you were a family of five people, it could be several thousand dollars to pay for all the applications. But you know how our communities are; they'll come up with it, you know. They will. They work three jobs. They don't buy cars. They don't spend money on anything, and they come up with it. Still, there were a lot of people that weren't going to come up with it.

So, I worked with Presbyterians, especially. There was a guy in a Presbyterian church. Charlie Buchman Ellis was his name. Charlie said, "You know what? I can get you some money, Carlos, serious money, tens of thousands, like quick. It seems to me that we should be able to help some families to be able to apply for this." Then, you know, there was a deadline. So we raised, I can't remember now. It was six figures. I know it was six figures. We raised, I don't know, $200,000, 250,000, something like that with different church denominations and different churches. We created it on the spot. Literally, we only had months of process for people to apply to my office at the Council of Churches for assistance with the application for IRCA. This was the amnesty, *amnistía*.

LD: Right, right.

CM: So this will get you on track, you know. All I remember is it was just a flurry. We put together a working group, a collaborative table of people from the different denominations, and of people from, Neighborhood House, Casa de Esperanza, several groups, all the ones who were in contact with people in their community. We just started taking applications and handing out funding. We were doing it like right up to the last hour that people could apply.

Tim Johnson, my dear friend, a minister on the West Side—God bless him; he's still around doing good race equity work—called me up and says, "I've got a family here. They just walked in. They need like, I don't know, *dos mil*. They showed me the papers," and this and that. I said, "Okay, I'll cut you a check. We've only got like an hour or two." How are we going to do this? I said, "Tim, you're going to have to go down to immigration." [laughter] So we met down at immigration – it was right down to the final hour.

LD: Wow.

CM: I forget how many families, but it was hundreds, hundreds of families and thousands of people that we were able to help with that.

We, then, realized that people need continuing help. There were certain things that you needed to continue doing. There were things that could not depend on welfare. You couldn't be dependent on government programs. None of that. So we saw a need for a small loan program, nothing big, just to make ends meet, to buy groceries, to be able to pay a month's rent. Well, we started a program called "Sin Fronteras." Sin Fronteras took its name from a program out East. Their motto was *Nadie es ilegal*. You've seen that now.

LD: Sure.

CM: So it's a common thing. No human is illegal.

So we took that and we structured a program around it. For several years, we ran Sin Fronteras as a revolving loan cycle. It was phenomenal. People actually paid us back. People don't think that poor people pay. They do! Poor people always pay things back. It's people who have money who don't pay things back. [chuckles]

It was so long ago. I can't remember. I left the Council office to run for office. It was, in my mind, I think, really the first organized collaborative effort—there's that word again, collaborative—around immigration policy in our state. Not policy, because we weren't dealing with policy yet, but dealing with immigration realities in a very concrete way, helping folks.

When I ran for office, I remember the *Star Tribune* asking me, "So what do you bring to the legislature? What makes you unique or whatever?" I said, "Well, you know, a number of things." I talked about immigration. "What does that have to do with the State Legislature?"

LD: [chuckles]

CM: "Well, probably nothing, but it probably should." They didn't get it then. Of course, now, everybody gets it, you know.

This isn't so much about Carlos. I think what this means is that policy, in my mind, is driven by the reality of *igual*. The reality of *igual* is in constant change. Prior to 1986 IRCA, prior to 1980 Hmong, prior to 1980 Marielito, all these trends and all these movements in humanity, they built a critical mass, in my mind, and they get to a point where they force the issue. How do all of us in the main deal with, interact with, respond to, that reality? We can respond to it, you know, *poco a poco*. It's like one immigrant, I can deal with. That doesn't require a big policy change. One Hmong, I can deal with that. Fifty thousand Hmong? Ten thousand Marielitos? Eleven million undocumented? Ten million are probably Latinos. That's not just something you can deal with on a day-to-day kind of basis. You need big systemic policy frameworks to modernize and ramp up to be able to meet those realities.

For me, what's interesting as I look back is that I was involved in immigration work. AIDS is a public health issue having to do with race disparities. Just like people before me were dealing with it in small pieces, I was dealing with it in small pieces, but each piece gets bigger over time. Now, you can't talk about that work unless you're talking about major political movements, major policy frames, major ways for us ultimately to rethink who we are as Americans. It isn't possible to think of yourself as an American unless you're thinking about undocumented people. That, to me, is the biggest psychological issue we have right now. We have an immigration problem. No. No. We have a reality; it's an American reality. *That's* how you need to approach this. No, it's not like it's going to go away *mańana*. This is who we are: American people who are undocumented, American people who have AIDS, American people who are gay, American people, on and on. This is who we are. We used to think we can deal with these things and put them in a little closets and have special little programs, a bloc of outreach to Latino's, because, you know, it's not really that important. [chuckles]

But it's the only thing that's important. That's what we are, diversity. It's the only thing that's important. It's an incredible challenge.

It's a maturing, I think, that's possible for us as a people. In my life, as I get to where I'm at as a legislator and with my work here, I've had a personal maturing process of understanding. At first, I just reacted to it the same way. I'm not going to react to it. I'm not going to think about the big picture because I don't think about big pictures. I think about details. Now, I realize I *do* have to think about details, but it is about the big picture.

LD: Right.

CM: It's about being a leader in this society and being a leader isn't just dealing with things on the margins. There are always going to be those things, but it's about understanding how all those things add up to big indications about who we are as a people, our character, what our vision is, what our future is. There are so many more little stories. We're telling stories about how these things constantly add up.

LD: Clearly, you've talked about your passion for community organizing from a very young age and kind of what led up to, let's see, time line-wise, you running for office. Was there anyone particular thing that…?

CM: That triggered that?

LD: Yes, the catalyst.

CM: Are you ready for another story?

LD: [laughter] Yes, I'm going to settle in.

CM: Well, technically what happened was that as I was doing my organizing work at the Justice Center when I was there, I was beginning to interact more with local elected officials. So I started to get interested. You've got to connect with people. Who are these people called elected officials who can make this thing happen, make good things happen? That's kind of how it started.

I have a friend named Juan [Figueroa]. Juan actually ran for governor in Connecticut this year as kind of an Independent, almost, but he's a Democrat. He was in the primary, but he was not backed. He is a beautiful person, very socially justice focused, very accomplished. He's head of a major health public policy initiative [Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut] in the state of Connecticut. Juan was, also, one of the first persons I met when I came to Minnesota, because he was already, I think, a senior, maybe a junior, at Macalester. He is a Puerto Rican from the hills of Puerto Rico, who had become very, I guess we would say, radical, and very focused on social justice. He became a lawyer, and became the first Puerto Rican elected to the Connecticut legislature. When I called Juan up, I told him about dropping out of law school. Of course, he thought that was a bad idea. I said, "I just need to find out what I'm going to do." He said, "Carlos, here's my advice, man. Find a community that you can commit yourself to, that you love, and be a part of that community in such a way that you can feel the pulse of it."

That's how he described it, feel the pulse of that community and its beat. So that's, I guess in many ways, what I did with the West Side, where Maritza, my wife, is from.
LD: Oh. so your wife was from Minnesota?

CM: Maritza was born in New Jersey, same background. Both parents were immigrants from Puerto Rico who met in New York, married. She was born in Jersey and lived the first ten years of her life in Jersey. In fact, when I first met her, she still had a Jersey accent. I used to make fun of her. She grew up on the West Side.

LD: Okay.

CM: From the age of ten or eleven, she went to Humboldt High School, graduated from Humboldt, went to the U of M. So she was the one who really kind of drew me into the West Side. Then, when we got married, we moved there, and started our life there.

Being a part of the pulse of the community was the work, but it was, also, being involved locally, so I was involved in WSCO, the West Side Citizens Organization. I was on La Clinica Board. I have a great story about being on the La Clinica Board.

LD: [laughter]

CM: The Neighborhood House and Services Board. God, there must have been like four or five community-based organizations that, at one time, I served on their boards and learned a lot about processes and community work, but, also, met a lot of people.

LD: Yes.

CM: Which, later on, turned out to be a real good asset for me running for office.

Sandy [Sandra] Pappas was challenging Frank Rodriquez for the House seat and came and asked for my support. I said, "You've got to be crazy." [chuckles] I said, "he's a Latino. I'm a Latino. I don't have anything against Frank." So she went away, but she persisted. She came back. The long story short is that I backed her. What had happened was that—may Frank rest in peace; I think he was a good guy—Frank had just sort of checked out. There was a Chicano kid that got beat up. Frank just wasn't, well, very interested.

That wasn't where Frank was at. Frank was into other things. So, I was just an impatient young guy who thought that Frank needed to be responding to those issues on the street.

LD: Let's focus on you.

CM: Yes. So I backed Sandy, which put me in a really weird spot.

LD: Sure.

CM: It turned out that a lot of Latinos, also, felt alienated, so they supported her. Well, that kind of put me on the map politically. I was part of a process that led to a new person getting seated in the legislature.

Then, many years later, fast forward, she's running for state Senate seat. She called me up and said, "I'm running for the Senate seat. Will you support me?" I said, "Yes, Sandy. You're a good person," and this and that. Then, she said, "By the way, that means this House seat is open. I think you ought to run for it."

LD: [chuckles]

CM: I said, "Really?" She said, "Yes, I think you ought to run for it." So, then, began the process of trying to discover whether I was going to run for it or not.

Honest to god, there was no one thing that started the process. All the pieces were in place. I had experience building community. I'd done some organizing. I understood state policy issues and frameworks. I had networks; I knew people and people knew me, etcetera. But there was something missing, you know.

This all happened at the time when the Jesuit priests and their housemates, their staff, in El Salvador.

LD: Yes.

CM: You remember that.

LD: Yes.

CM: Were massacred. There was an action here, a big action. Some very courageous people did a hunger strike. You remember they chained themselves to the Cathedral of St. Paul, which created a political problem for Archbishop John Roach, who I really like. I have great stories about John, because I, also, had served, and maybe still was serving at that time, on this commission of social justice. Archbishop Roach knew he didn't want people dying in his Cathedral. [chuckles]

LD: Yes.

CM: But, he, also, knew that he didn't want to call the police to come in and cut them loose. So it was a brilliant move on the part of the activists, thought out strategically. They were dying. They were in bad shape. Ultimately, as you know, it culminated in this truce, if you will, this agreement, this settlement where the Archbishop and others leveraged a commitment on the part of the local and national elected officials to advocate for the end to military investment in El Salvador. The killers in El Salvador were just, frankly, the government and the catalyst for that. So it was Governor [Rudy] Perpich, Senator [Dave] Durenberger, Senator [Rudy] Boschwitz, Congressmen [Martin] Sabo, and Bruce Vento. It was a Who's Who List, you know. The whole agreement culminated—I don't know if you were there—in a big service at the Cathedral.

LD: When was this, again?

CM: It was the year I chose to run, so it was 1990.

LD: I was in junior high.

CM: You were very young.

LD: Yes. [chuckles]

CM: Well, anyway, everyone came to the Cathedral for this big ritual, frankly. It wasn't a Mass. It was this big service ritual. All the civic leaders, Republican and Democrats, basically got up and made the commitment to end the violence, to be part of ending the violence in El Salvador, and to press our government to quit sending military aid to the butchers in El Salvador. I was involved in Our Lady of Guadalupe Church quite a bit. Our Lady decided to send a group from Our Lady to the Cathedral to be a part. So parishes were sending people from all over the Twin Cities. The people from Our Lady decided to walk to the Cathedral.

It was cold. It was fall or maybe early winter, but it was cold. We decided to bring out the Señora. As you know, you don't bring her out very often. You bring her out at fiesta. That's it.

LD: Yes.

CM: You only bring her out on very special occasions. I remember we had this little cart. We actually wrapped her up, you know. Yes, put little blankets around her so she wouldn't get cold, and carted her across the High Bridge. I can't remember if it was the old High Bridge or the new High Bridge. All I know is it was cold.

The wind was blowing and we were singing just to stay warm, you know, crossing the bridge. We walked all the way from Our Lady to the Cathedral that way. That was the long way to go. The word got out in the Cathedral that the people from Our Lady were coming and they're walking, so they actually waited for us to get there. Then, they made space for us right up front, because of our demonstration. As we neared the Cathedral, *everyone* in the Cathedral started singing. And we sang. It was an *incredibly* spiritual, powerful moment.

LD: Wow.

CM: I sat there frozen. [chuckles] We all sat there frozen. We heard all our politicians get up and talk about what they were going to do and the evilness of what was going on for the Salvadoran people, that we have to stop being a part of that, and justice and peace and democracy, etcetera. Of course, the priest got up and contextualized it all in the gospel. It was an *incredibly* powerful evening. I remember sitting there thinking, you know *that's* what politicians should do.

When it was over, we got a ride back. I said, "No, I want to walk." And I walked back because, by then, I had to think about running for office. Everything added up, you know. I could win this race. Everything was there, but there was something missing, and I couldn't figure out what it was. I remember people calling me, They would call me up and just drive me nuts. "Have you decided yet, brother?" [chuckles] "Come on, man. What are you waiting for? Let us know."

I decided I was going to walk back and have time to think. I walked home and I decided I was going to run for office. It just all made sense to me.

I think we ran our campaign with that kind of spirit. It wasn't just a mechanical thing. We had to learn a lot of mechanical pieces that we'd never done before, but it was always about doing it for the right reason, for the right spirit. In the end, we wound up with a unanimous endorsement at the convention. I don't think that was an accident. I think it's because people knew that we had put together a group of folks who were doing this for the right reason, not just the intellectually right reason, but there was a dynamic here that needs to be a part of politics. So there are no simple answers to your question.

LD: Yes.

CM: There were all these pieces that just kind of came together.

LD: It's almost like cinematic. I can see it happening, you know?

CM: Yes. That probably happens a lot more than we think it does, frankly.

LD: Yes.

CM: I've met a lot of people in office and they may not have had as dramatic a moment, or may not even be aware, but I think Americans shouldn't be so cynical about their elected officials. There are a lot of people in office that have the equivalent of those kinds of things happen to them. Something that really drives them to public service. It isn't just about what you see in the campaigns. I hate campaigns, because that's all you see. There are people who are really motivated by something deeper. I don't think it's even a minority of elected officials. It's a lot of them.

LD: That's heartening.

CM: I think it's true.

LD: Let's step back. Throughout this time, you would have been seeing a *huge* change in the Latino community.

CM: Yes.

LD: And certainly changes from when you got into office, when you won, till now. I do want to get to your work here at MMEP, but let's talk a little bit about those changes that you've seen from when you first arrived in Minnesota and saw a very homogeneous society to now. What has that been like?

CM: Sometimes, it's confusing. It's—I love this word—discombobulating.

LD: Yes.

CM: It throws you off. It feels to me like, at fifty-three, that I should really understand all this stuff and kind of be in control of it. It's like every year I understand less of it.

LD: [laughter]

CM: And have less control of it. That feels both right and, then, I worry about things. I just think it's important for the Latino community and Latino communities to have a common agenda, because I understand the politics. There's power behind that.

LD: Right.

CM: But I also know that you can't force that on people. What we're talking about is that our realities are *so* diverse now.

LD: Yes.

CM: So I represent a district [65b] that was the largest Latino populated district when I first ran. That's twenty years ago. Now, it's maybe the third largest Latino populated district, maybe lower. There are two districts up and down Lake Street in Minneapolis that have larger Latino populations. At least when I was there yesterday, it was like when I walk around, oh, man, I still can't believe it.

LD: [chuckles]

CM: There were Latino people just walking around everywhere, and I remember when there was nothing there. Those two districts, Karen Clark's [61a] and Jeff Hayden's [61b] district, are the number one and number two populated Latino districts in the state. The east side of Saint Paul is big. Greater Minnesota communities are growing. Suburban communities don't have those kind of numbers, buy, hey, you know, out in Richfield, you might as well be in little Mexico. All that is by way of saying that the district I have—this is a generalization—is a district with an old Latino presence.

LD: Right.

CM: It's not at all unusual, not at all. You'll find third generation, fifth generation of Latinos, people whose history goes back a long way. There are families that go back to the early 1900s in a handful of cases, and, then, easily, by the time we get up to World War II there are a lot of World War II veterans on the West side. Tons of Korean vets and Vietnam, of course. So people have been there a long time. They're different than someone who crossed the border even ten years ago.

LD: Sure.

CM: Different, different, different people. They speak differently. They look at the world differently. Their cultures, what turns them on, what they celebrate, the music, it's

different. It's *igual*, you know. It's Spanish. It's their unifying kind of thing, but, actually, a lot of my family almost never even speak Spanish anymore. [chuckles]

LD: Right.

CM: It's *igual* in many ways, but it's also very different. From my Council of Churches days, we had a lot of kind of more mainstream churches. Now there is incredible diversity, evangelicals and Pentecostals. I went down to Faribault [Minnesota] six years ago to some campaigning for a great person who was running there. She asked me to come down for Cinco de Mayo. It was Cinco when I drove down there. I don't know Faribault real well. I said, "No problem." I'll drive down to Faribault. Give me general directions. Where I see my people hanging out, that's where I need to be.

LD: [chuckles]

CM: So I drive in a park and I saw my people hanging out. So I drove up. It wasn't Cinco de Mayo. I couldn't, I'm like, how can this be? You know what it was? It was a big evangelical church community picnic.

LD: Ohhh.

CM: Huge! One evangelical church. There were hundreds of people there, mostly Latinos. I'm like, I can't believe this. I drove up another mile, and there's the big Cinco de Mayo with all my people hanging out.

[laughter]

CM: And I said, "Do you guys know that there's another group just down the road?" They said, "Oh, yes, they're at the park, hanging out at the park. They have events all the time with tents. But we're doing Cinco de Mayo. They don't do this kind of celebrating. We've got beer here." [laughter] Okay, I get it, you know. But who would have thought?

LD: In Faribault.

CM: What I've seen is just this incredible not just growth of the numbers. That's for sure. We used to sit around as young people and fantasize. We knew. In the 1980s, we'd sit there. We knew the numbers. We'd look at the trends and I said, "Do you know what this means, man? This means by the year 2000, we're going to have this number of Latinos here. By the year 2010, we're going to have this number of Latinos. Do you know what that means?" We were kind of guessing what that means. We knew the numbers were going to happen, and we knew that it was going to be a transformative thing for Minnesota. What we didn't really know was just how diverse the big Latino community was going to be, just how incredibly different. So I think that's the biggest change.

Obviously, there was also the numbers we saw in small communities all over the state popping up. We had already seen some of that in little towns twenty-three years ago.

Clara City and little towns up and down the Red River Valley. We knew that. But, now, there are even more of those, and they have a big impact on institutions. We also knew what was going to happen just looking at the numbers. We just really didn't know what it meant. What does it mean for Moorhead or Worthington to have half its school district be Latino?

LD: Yes.

CM: That's what it is.

LD: Yes. What does it mean?

CM: Do you know what it means? It means that we're a Latino nation. [laughter] I know if people hear that they'd get put off. But here's why Latinos might get put off: we're redefining what it means to be a Latino nation. Maybe a better way of saying it is that we're really redefining what America is.

LD: Yes.

CM: It's just hard for me to think of America without thinking of Latinos *es imposible*.

LD: Right.

CM: *And*, it's getting harder for me to think of Latinos without thinking about Americans in general.

LD: Yes.

CM: It's not quite a mix, but the mix suggests that nothing's going to change—except maybe for the Latinos. It's a mix and everyone's in the same space, and they're all doing their own thing, but we're all in the same space, and we see each other, and we're with each other, that kind of thing.

So it means the transformation of our state; that's what it means. You can call it whatever you want, but I like to say that we're becoming Latino. It doesn't mean that we're static. I don't think cultures are static.

LD: Right.

CM: That defies cultures. Cultures are, in my mind, evolving and living dynamics. Just like when we take in air and water, you take in perspectives and *costumbres*, and you grow. You breathe it out and your body changes, etcetera. Again, just the incredible diversity. That's the part that really is tough for me. It's like, I had a sense in the 1990s of what it meant to be a Latino elected official, playing this leader role. In the year 2010, I have a different sense of that.

It's not so much about playing a leader role as much as just staying up and hip and relevant, you know. So it's not really about me. It's not about you. It's about this living thing that keeps changing, which means I have to constantly learn, which, in a way, suggests some of this is kind of foreign to me.

LD: Sure.

CM: I'm a Latino, but there are Latino dynamics that I don't know as well.

LD: Well, it is complicated because we come from more than, what, twenty countries and different languages, different socio-economic levels, etcetera; but in the United States, we're still grouped as this monolithic Latino community

CM: Yes.

LD: From your perspective. You have a really, really interesting kind of eye on things. Two parts. What are some of the contributions that we've made? The second part is what are the challenges that face us as this oddly eclectic, yet still grouped together, community?

CM: Right.

LD: Let's start with contributions. What have we added to the fabric of Minnesota?

CM: Well, we've added economic vitality. There's no question about it.

When the governor was proposing some pretty, in my opinion, harsh immigration proposals eight years ago, we were desperately trying to stop him. [chuckles] We were having a hard time. We slowed him down, but we couldn't quite stop him. Do you know when it stopped? It was when—I forget how many there were—seven or eight, economic sectors in Minnesota came together and sent a message to the Legislature in the form of a letter. Primarily, we're talking, you know, the meat packing industry, the landscaping industry, the horse racing industry, the dairy industry, the whole agricultural vegetable industry, and a few others. They all got together and sent this very concise letter with a strong message and said, "We're not going to get involved with politically motivated, government and Legislature on immigration, trying to create immigration policies. We just want to remind you that we represent x-billion dollars a year to Minnesota's business economy. That economy rests upon the labor of x-number of hundreds of thousands of immigrants." They didn't talk about Latino, you know. They just kind of laid it out matter of fact. "Whatever you do, bear that in mind. You have to be careful with this. There's a lot at stake here." I swear to God, it all stopped.

CM: The letter literally landed on our desks. That's a really good quick story about just how important the Latino community is. In this case, we're talking about immigrants, but

we know that, by and large, you're talking about a critical mass that exists within the Latino community.

When we were on Lake Street yesterday, we were noticing the number of East Africans, Somalis, in some industries and retail outlets. That's great! It's beautiful. It's wonderful. My observation was that it needed to be a Latino thing first.

The only reason it needed to be a Latino first is because that's the only community that has that kind of critical mass to move something as big as transforming an entire business strip in this largest city in the State of Minnesota. It doesn't mean there would not have been the Somali retail business, but there would not be a dynamic economic strip, you know, based on that one community. Maybe in the future there will be. Right now, it's driven by Latino demographics. We have the critical mass, and the critical mass is only going to continue to grow.

So it's about economic transformation and, then, ultimately, that spills over into all sorts of other transformative things. Eventually, there are also so many different types of religious communities. We have churches in this state in small towns that not only provide for spiritual needs for the community but also bring identity to those communities.

LD: Yes.

CM: But, they also have a presence in places across the border. They're sending money back. They're sending ideas back. There's a fertile exchange, even if it's just an idea about how you evangelize in a community, that's happening. [chuckles] So there's a social transformation that's happening. A lot of that is changing the physical space of Minnesota. When we walk down the street in Worthington, or in most towns you know, nowadays, you're going to run into Latino businesses.

LD: Yes.

CM: There are grocery stores here and there. That changes the physical look, the physicality of a place. Ultimately, all of this adds up to a psychological transformation. As a Minnesotan, you begin to think of that physical manifestation and that social dynamic and the economic mix as normal, not abnormal. So, to answer your question directly, concretely. We can talk about the economic and physical, but there's something else that's happening. It's a redefining. When I first came here, you know, who were we? Norwegians, with lefsa and that kind of thing.

LD: Yes.

CM: It's like who are we? We're Latinos. We're Mexicanos. We're El Salvadorans, Puerto Ricans.

When I was in college—I brag about this—I became a young adult at the height of salsa music. It's a way of saying that Salsa music was my generation's music. I knew it was older cats that were making it, but we were the ones who were buying up the records. We were the ones who were dancing to it. We were the ones who invented the dances. It was us; it was us. If you wanted to hear salsa music, not even just live, forget it. You couldn't find it live. There was only one salsa band and it took till 1973 or 1974 for that to come around. If you wanted to hear salsa music, mostly there was only one place you could hear it, and that was in somebody's apartment. That's the *only* place. You didn't hear it on the radio. You didn't hear it clubs. You didn't hear it in commercials. You didn't hear it in elevators. You know what? You can hear it now in all those places.

LD: Right.

CM: Two weeks ago, on the radio, in City of Chaska, there was a big fund raiser for the Jaycees [Junior Chamber of Commerce] in Chaska. It was going to be down by the lake. It sounded like a blast—I should have gone. There will be several bands over a weekend, and, then, they rattled off the names of the bands, and one of them was a salsa band.

LD: [laughter]

CM: The Jaycees in Chaska! A fundraiser!

LD: Yes.

CM: When Maritza and I were married, we had our reception at the Czech Hall on West Seventh Street in Saint Paul. It was appropriate, very ethnic.

LD: [chuckles]

CM: Very Eastern European. They were just like us, you know, very immigrant. Maritza's Uncle Kiko, was the leader of the first salsa band. My roommate, Jorge, was the conga player with the salsa band.

LD: [chuckles]

CM: Her cousin, Freddie, was the bongo player. Her cousin, Edwin, was the lead singer. It was like, and they were the only live salsa band within 400 miles.

LD: Wow.

CM: You had to go to Chicago—maybe Milwaukee, but I doubt it.—to find a live salsa band. On August 21, 1982, the only salsa band within 400 miles played at the Czech Hall on West Seventh Street In St. Paul.

LD: [laughter]

CM: That was the only place. We invited 200 people. We had almost 500 people show up.

LD: [laughter]

CM: People came because it was salsa. It was great!

LD: [laughter]

CM: It was beautiful. It worked out fine. My point is, beyond the fun, that we've been transformed so that on any given weekend now, you can pick where you're going to listen to salsa. You can pick where you're going to eat tacos. You can even find… What's the food you guys eat? Pupusas?

LD: Pupusas. [chuckles]

CM: Like in more than one place.

LD: Yes! I know.

CM: Not just the church basement.

LD: I know. Believe me, we're very happy about that.

CM: You should be. It's a damn good food.

So we transform; that's what it means.

LD: Yes.

CM: The challenge? What is the challenge?

LD: What do we need to work towards? What's in our way?

CM: Well, I'm sure there's like a macro answer. There are also a couple below macro level, but real big. Obviously, immigration issues are huge. It's larger than people think it is, because there's a psychology, if you will. I'm going to do my analysis. We deal with things mechanically. This is that problem. That's a dropout problem. That's a diabetes problem. This is a water quality problem. If we spend some time, we begin to understand that they're all really interconnected.

LD: Right.

CM: There is no immigration problem. There are only undocumented people, immigrants, you know. It's a total Latino reality.

LD: Yes.

CM: We know the obvious. We have families, one is undocumented and the others documented. It's husband and wife, children, grandparents, you know. Friends. Church members. People at my work who work together. You can't separate it out. If you separate it out, you tear apart a community.

When the federal department sent their number two guy in Homeland Security here to Neighborhood House a little over a year ago, he was asking for reasons to pass immigration reform. They were pretty obvious questions. I said, "Well, you know, I understand all the reasons like social justice and the economic argument. "But I want you to understand something else. Until we get immigration right in this county, it tears my community apart. I'm not just talking about my Latino community. It does that. It tears my community apart. It means that people who live in the same space are faced with the same threats. My neighbor's going to disappear *mańana*. My customer isn't going to come in. My worker is not going to show up. The kid that I'm teaching that I've made so much progress with isn't going to be there. *That's* what it means. How do I build community with that kind of fear, with that kind of reality? The strength of a society is based on families and based on communities. *That's* what this means for us."

So I would say immigration, but I know there's a bigger challenge for us. The thing that might be a bigger challenge is how do we accept our connection with everyone else? I have no interest in building a Latino community. I really don't. I have an interest in building community.

That means I have to reinforce things that are Latino. It mean I have to know my history. I have to know my culture, my language. All those things are vitally important, but they're not important by themselves. They're important because in this place, it's about us building community together. I think maybe that's the big challenge. Maybe the big fear is that we're just going to go off and tribalize ourselves.

I was watching New York - their legislature, you know the New York Legislature. You have the Puerto Ricans who have dominated because they were the first ones there. So they elect the senators and the rest. But now there's like Dominicans. Pretty soon, there's going to be Mexicans, because there's a pretty big Mexican community in New York. It's still blows my mind. But, the way you do work out East is not through coalitions. It's not through collaboration. It's through these very racialized, ethnicized enclaves who compete with one another. I was watching the New York state senate, and I was watching this play itself out. The blacks, the Latinos, the Puerto Ricans, the Dominicans are all separate, and in the end none of them have any power.

LD: Right.

CM: So you get the bonding experience, but your people are still poor. Half your kids are still dropping out of high school. I mean, come on.

I know this sounds philosophical, but I do think that we have those special, very unique issues like immigration, for sure. We can talk about language issues, but I think it's ultimately a psychological issue for us in terms of how do we—I don't want to sound patronizing—own a mutual responsibility, based on equality absolutely, to build community together? I think it's hard to not get confused when you want to just do your own thing—quote/unquote. I want to do my thing. I want to eat rice and beans. I don't even want to hear English. Even though I don't speak Spanish, that's all I want to hear. I want to hear my *musica*. I get that. I need that, but I don't confuse that with placing myself in a bigger context. I think that's our challenge as a people. I think we're going to meet it, frankly. I think we're highly adaptive and creative. We've got good leadership. We have a good history of struggle. We have a connection to our native countries that's very real, you know. I don't want to put the Irish down or the Italians, but we don't view our countries, at least this at this point, historically as just sort of places to go as a tourist. That's where our people live.

LD: Yes.

CM: Because that's where our people live, their struggles inform us of what we need to do here. So we have access to that. I don't know. I don't know if that makes sense.

LD: It does. Absolutely, it does.

I want to respect your time, but I would be remiss to not hear a little bit about the work that you do here with MMEP.

CM: Yes.

LD: When you were talking about your story of how you got into college, I mean, I look around your office, and I see that work reflected in what you do day-to-day. So, tell me about this non-profit and what you do here.

CM: This non-profit was put together, basically, by one of my college counselors, an American Indian, Ron McKinley, a wonderful person, a great leader in his own right. For Ron, basically what he learned is that it wasn't just about addressing students of color. It wasn't just about addressing their needs. It's how you do it, as well. So it's about being committed to a mission of equity, what we call race equity in education, being committed to it in terms of working collaboratively. So MMEP, at the core, is a number of educational institutions. It's Saint Paul/Minneapolis Public Schools, the integration districts, several suburban school districts, the University of Minnesota, MNSCU [Minnesota State Colleges and Universities], and the private colleges. We used to have a private high school group and I think they've disbanded. The idea is that you can do programming around things, but the real power is how do you learn from one another across these different institutions, but how do you reinforce and amplify what you're doing across these different educational institutions? So there's sort of this notion of social power again, social reference, social capital, you know, that goes beyond just the fact that I have social capital as a private college and I'm also working with a public

university. I'm working with the school district, and, ultimately, with communities of color. So collaboration is really at the core of it.

Over the years, we've done lots of different things in a collaborative way. We've delivered a lot of different services. We had a Teacher of Color Program for young kids, high school kids, where we encouraged them to go into teaching. We had an Empowerment Program. We traveled around the state to deliver these, with local folks, doing it collaboratively, again. We have a big college access program right now where we do travel around the state and conduct all sorts of seminars and workshops and training for folks that are culturally competent trainings to help get more people enrolled into college and be successful in college.

Then, we do a lot of research work, - that is the big other piece of what we do. As we do research, we shape public policy and we do advocacy for our public policy. So, over the years, we've played a role in legislation, played a role in bringing both private and federal resources into the state. We've played a role in policy that's been shaped by a number of different tables, whether it's a school board or one of these big groups out there, like the P-20 [Education] Council that has really done things like developing a common data sharing framework in our state so that we can track students. That's developed different approaches to assessing the K-12 success.

We try to interject ourselves at all these different sorts of policy levels and be informative. MNSCU, three years ago, under Jim McCormick's leadership, crafted this big initiative around race equity. He didn't use "race equity," because people are afraid to use those words, but we use it. They call it diversity, which is fine. They secured legislative funds to do that. We were the advisors, one of their advisors. We helped shape that. We helped motivate that. We interacted with their Board of Trustees. We're very visible on one hand, providing services to people and being very public around research and also in a public policy framework. Then, we also do a lot of back drop kind of work, which is, also, the kind of a style I often do at the Capital, as well, just trying to arm a broad group of people with good information and good motivation and aspiration around race equity in general.

LD: How long?

CM: A long time. I've been here, I came and left. I was here in 1991, I think. I was here for almost two years and, then, left. I was interim. Then, they hired a full time person, a permanent person, who didn't work out in the next two years. And then I came back. That put me out to 1998, 1999, so I've been here pretty steady since then.

LD: I could do a whole other three hours just on your work at the Capital.

CM: Yes.

LD: Gosh, really. [laughter] I could use another four tapes. Tell me about education and why it's your passion. We hear about all the statistics and hear the dropout rates. All of

that is there. What is it that drives you and what gives you hope? Why have you been here since 1998?

CM: Yes, yes. Well, there are times when I don't feel very hopeful. [laughter] Obviously, there is my own story, because I know the power of education. I also constantly interact with young people where things haven't worked out. You know, you talk with an African American young man at seventeen, and you know he's bright. You know he's a good person, and he's just totally lost, and he's looking for direction. It isn't like there aren't good things, there aren't good programs, but what captures me is that we can't program our way out or we can't program our way through.

Those are realities. We have systems. We invest a lot of resources. It is $16 billion we put into K-12 education in the State of Minnesota, annually, $16 billion. You don't just buy programs with that; you buy systems. It's hard for me to think about it. It's hard for most people to understand that we operate the level of systems. When you're over 5 million in the State of Minnesota, you operate in systems, which means that it's the responsibility of a system to do justice and to get it right for the African American seventeen-year-old boy. It's not just the responsibility of a program that gets not even a drop of that $16 billion. So there's a sense that I have about that, that we continue to hang onto this paternalistic sense that if you don't fit if you don't fit the size of the opportunity box that we created, then it's your fault.

LD: Yes.

CM: I just don't think that's the fault of a seventeen-year-old. Not only that, but I know what that's going to lead to. It's going to lead to waste at the best, and it's going to lead to damage at the worst.

When I became a legislator, the choice before me was to be really good at pork, you know, creating little programs. Actually, I've done that. I mean, I have, actually, created all sort of nice little things over the years with serious money. But the real power, the real imagination, the real possibility, potentiality for being a legislator is to shape systems around those values of justice. That's a challenge. But, in my case, it's around equality and justice.

Why is that important in my life? It's this. It always has been. It goes back to my earliest memories as a person. I remember, even before I went to school, walking around the *barrio* and having these thoughts that things should be better. I remember telling my dad that. He wondered what I was talking about? [chuckles] People shouldn't be poor, you know. I just knew it!

So my work in education at the Capital right now is, perhaps, very idealistic, but, it's also, [sigh] unidealistic and because of that, it can be very frustrating. It's hard to do systemic work. It's easier to pass a nice little program—and I do that. That's important. You get rewarded for that. You don't get rewarded for trying to turn the Titanic around in the middle of the ocean.

LD: Right.

CM: That reward comes later, you know.

My biggest fear and my biggest concern as an education policy person is that powerful folks don't have the same sense of urgency. They tell you they do, but they don't. [laughter] I don't know how to say it any other way.

LD: Yes.

CM: I suppose if it's your kid, you would have it. Maybe the fact that there's only—I know this is simple—like six people with power in the legislature has something to do with it. It's not like there aren't white folks who care about black kids or Indian kids. There are. There are wonderful people. This is the different sense of urgency. I expect to be frustrated on legislation. I don't expect to be frustrated in the sense of energy and the urgency that good policy requires when things are going this bad. Things are going bad. We lose half our black boys every year. Half, not ten percent. Half. For those that we do move forward, we don't do a very good job of preparing them either. It's the right thing to do. Part of who we are as American people is to get it right, even though we keep screwing it up. [chuckles]

Now, we have democracy. We have equality of laws around those things. I have a sense that it's part of our individual responsibility to make the effort. If you're not successful, someone will be. But no one will be if we're not making the effort. They have to have a base to build on. Sometimes, what we do is build a base for the next successful fight. In legislative work, it's not unusual for things to take years, even simple things. You have to be a very patient person when it comes to law making and public policy. The angst is that there's a juxtaposition of that knowledge with the sense of urgency.

I've got to get it right for this kid this year, you know. Ultimately, the final thing I'll say is that it's all about having a deep responsibility for running this world now as best as you can. I don't say even as best as you can, just running it well. I think you have to make the effort to realize what our expectations are. I don't know if that makes sense, but the responsibility is for all of us. The black kid not doing well in school, the Indian girl - if it's not good for them; it's not good for any of us.

LD: Right.

CM: So how can you be an elected official if you're not trying to make it right for all of us, for the community? I'm sorry. I'm philosophizing quite a bit.

LD: No, no, that's what it boils down to.

CM: Yes.

LD: Is there anything else that you'd like to comment on? It's honestly been a real privilege to hear your perspective, and I'm *so* glad that you decided to share this.

CM: Yes. I thank you for persisting.

[laughter]

LD: I think that this needs to go beyond just your words and your thoughts in your office, you know. I'm so glad that we'll be able to share this with a lot of people. So, thank you.

CM: Yes.

LD: Thank you very much.

CM: I appreciate it.