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From Immigrant to Ethnic: Interview with Juan Francisco by Joseph Conforti

Juan Francisco

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Rhode Island College
ETHNIC STUDIES PROJECT

Oral History Interview # 10

with

Juan Francisco

April 22, 1976

By Joseph Conforti

Tape 1 Side 1

- 10 Life in Dominican Republic. Moved from country to city and built house. Then father got job with government--frequent travel. His father's jobs were either with the government or the church.
- 55 Father and mother served as missionaries for 3 years at a time. Went to village, organized parish, built church then priest would be sent.
- 69 Frequent moving had effect on him. Mother didn't have time to pay much attention to her children. They were cared for by neighbors when parents were evangelizing.
- 135 His grandparents were not as religious as his parents.
- 155 He saw other relatives often--as contrasted to here in U.S. More hectic pace of living here.
- 198 Religion important in his upbringing. At age 15, he started wanting more independence about his beliefs and actions.
- 250 Schooling: he had 8 years of schooling in Dominican Republic. Had to be 9 to enter school.
- 275 Went to school at 8 A.M. Lunch and siesta at noon. Socializing at night, involved in some gang fights.
- 405 Very difficult to find jobs.
- 415 Adults had strong sense of neighborhood.

Tape 1 Side 2

- 1 Never worked as young boy or teenager. Two reasons for this: competition for jobs too strong--adults would

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compete for jobs, e.g. shining shoes or selling things on the streets. Another factor was tradition--young people come to believe it's impossible to work when young. If young children worked, it meant they were very poor and their parents couldn't adequately provide for them. If kids didn't work, family had more prestige.

- 53 Father's job was not secure. Everything depends on who you know and when you know them. Politics very important. Father eventually lost his government job.
- 80 Father tried many jobs: carpentry, barbering, radio technician. Opened barber shop. Family able to survive but not live well. Conditions worsened economically--began to consider immigrating to U.S.
- 124 Economic conditions of country bad in 1964. Father had family members in New York. Discussion of internal politics of Dominican Republic.
- 190 Father came to New York alone. Stayed and worked for 3 years as barber. Sent money back. Then he began to send for them.
- 208 When father left, oldest brother was not responsible for welfare of family. So he had to assume the responsibilities even though he was only about 13.
- 252 The fact that his father was in America gave his family prestige.
- 280 Father would send postcards with snow cover and he couldn't believe it was true. They all underestimated the cold. Arrived without proper winter clothing. Many people have misconceptions about climate here and about economic conditions here. He thinks people should be better informed before immigrating.
- 475 He wanted to return to Dominican Republic right away. Drastic changes, unprepared, culture shock.
- 510 Father met them in New York and brought them to apartment he had rented in Bronx.

Tape 2 Side 1

- 2 Life in Bronx: found difficulty being accepted--he couldn't associate with people his age, he was regarded as different. Religion became important to him--used it as socializing agency. Belonged to Pentecostal church as did most Latin Americans in his area.
- 65 Church gave him sense of community, sense of belonging.

Juan Francisco

- 85 He began to realize many of his ideas about America were wrong. Heard about cleanliness, newness of things, ease of getting money.
- 108 Lived in New York 2 years in very bad neighborhood--not accepted at all, people hostile to them.
- 215 Family moved to another apartment in Bronx--more problems there because they were different.
- 246 Moved to West Bronx, near other family members.
- 260 Came to Providence. Brother came and made contact with Pentecostal church here. Rented apartment near Cranston Street and rest of family came.
- 318 Father planning to continue barbering in New York and visit family on weekends. Did this for some time then moved to Providence and became pastor of a Pentecostal church.
- 355 Church in Providence not as important to him.
- 405 He found people here friendly. Made friends at school.
- 455 Spanish-speaking people have sense of community here--most live in South Providence. Country of origin becoming less important than fact that person is Spanish-speaking.

Tape 2 Side 2

- 2 First lived on Sprague Street then Cranston Street then Manton Avenue. He found that landlords took advantage of Spanish-speaking people--high rents.
- 30 He belongs to Spanish groups, works at Urban League, helped set up Latin American Center.
- 48 Wife is an American. Has both American and Spanish friends. Wife interested in learning to speak Spanish.
- 75 He's happy here. Sees more opportunities here. He can see himself as a leader of growing Spanish community.
- 85 Customs. Sees American culture as more flexible, more freedom of action even for children. Tends to act like American with Americans and retains Dominican customs when with his family.
- 125 Most of his family in area. One brother married Puerto Rican, 2 others married Americans. In this sense, his family doesn't follow Dominican customs.
- 165 No longer thinks of returning permanently to Dominican Republic. Plans to become U.S. citizen and become politically active here.