

Interview with: José Negrón (translation)

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Machine: Sanyo Memo-Scriber

Side A

002: Jose A. Negrón Cruzado. "I was born in Manati, Puerto Rico, the 14th of Novemeber of 1914. At the beginning of the first [world] war." His father was of Spanish origin, Aquilino Negrón, mother Maria Cruzado. He was one of 12 children. He has an older sister in PR who is 93, the youngest is 74, lives in Bklyn, NY. Amanda Negrón Cruzado. A little sister of his father who is in Manhattan, Ramona Negrón.

032: He doesn't remember his grandparents. His father was the son of don Jose Negrón. His grandparents were born in PR of Spanish parents [or of Spanish origin generations ago], from Mallorca.

052: "My father was a shoemaker, he was the boss of a workshop, what they call a foreman. A factory of native [*nativos*]shoes, women's shoes, men's shoes, especially for the farm workers...boots. So papa was what they call today a saddlemaker, he made the seats that you mounted on a horse. My father was very skilled."

065: "The children had to learn something from the father. I learned...to make shoes. But I mostly devoted myself [to that] later on, when I was alone, my father had died, to fix them, to resole them." JN was young when his father died in the Presbyterian hospital after an operation. His mother had died when JN was 14, his father had another woman, a foster mother, a *campesina boricua* [PR peasant]. She raised the siblings too (he mentions some of his siblings' names) His father had already had that woman but he went and got her when JN's mother died. His father was a rascal [*travieso*]. Doña Maria Oquendo [his other woman] from a Ciales barrio.

103: "I was born in Manati, but I was raised in Ciales, and I remember my father's work well...He took us to the workshop...I remember the owner of the workshop well...I remember school, I went to school in Ciales until second year of high school. And after I finished second year I couldn't continue because I had malaria...I continued working in my house with the work tools, fixing shoes."

119: During that time I got together with a young woman from Ciales, I got married to Dorca Rosario...we were in the same evangelical congregation...My daughter Edna was born. And during that time, well, the Second World War came, they called me for military service...where I was for a year and a half. In the army they took us to the Pacific, we were stationed in Hawaii, I

was a sergeant of the army in Hawaii and I spent 6 months in Hawaii working...as a soldier. Then I returned to Puerto Rico."

144: "My second daughter was born sick, and they called me back from Hawaii...I went back to PR, I got discharged and I went to school...the army offered veterans...equivalency exams...and I passed the exams...they gave me a high school diploma. I went to the evangelical seminary of PR...in Rio Piedras. I was there for 4 years, 3 years in the seminary, and one year of university...I graduated with a college diploma."

166: "When I had malaria, they spoke of praying for the sick, and I joined the church in Ciales, Disciple of Christ, and they prayed for me, and I believe it cured me. And I remained enthusiastic...I went to work a lot in the Ciales countryside, to evangelize, bring literature, the New Testament...And then the pastor of that time called me to be a minister...He backed me for the seminary. You had to have a sponsor."

180: "I got educated. Then I worked as a pastor in PR in the Ciales countryside...Gato Viejo and Rio Arriba...from there I went to Toa Alta as a pastor...and from Toa Alta I went to Cataño...My daughter was sick then...A doctor from Manati who was a school friend suggested that I bring the child to the United States. So I resigned from the church in Cataño and I came to the United States, helped by...a sister that I had in New York, and I brought...the two girls and a boy...who was born when I graduated in 1950...I brought them to NY in 1954. I worked as assistant to an evangelical pastor, in what was called the Beautiful Church [*iglesia hermosa*]." He took the little girl to Flower Hospital and then Montefiore in the Bronx, an operation on her arteries/heart valves? [*ductos de corazon*] and it was successful.

208: "But in that time the mission that had supported me with a salary left me with no salary and I had to work. The curious thing is that I went to the Hispanic Museum of NY...the Hispanic Society of America, I went to work there as an employee, cleaning, what they call a porter, I had to work [there] for a year."

217: "They called me again from the mission to go to another pastor post in Bridgeport, CT. I was there also for a year working as an evangelical pastor, and when it ended, well...since I was a veteran I went to the veterans' hospital here in Newington, and they treated me for a disease I had gotten in PR, bilarcia [?]....It's an intestinal disease. I got it from bathing in the rivers in PR...some parasites that are in the river snails."

234: "Then they gave me a scholarship to study to be a nurse. I had a good command of English...I studied auxiliary nursing in the veterans' hospital. Then I brought the family that was in PR and I went to another town that is called Bristol...when I was 62...I retired."

261: His wife came down with Alzheimer's. Edna went to study at Htfd College for Women for 2 years, a scholarship. He had bought his house in Bristol. He decided to sell the house and go to PR with his sick wife. His daughter Enid was a realtor. She's very intelligent. He bought a house in Trujillo Alto where he lived with his wife. She died (in 1992).

286: "I was left alone...until my oldest daughter Edna had her own house, she went to Puerto Rico and brought me back, and until now [since 1992.]" First in her house and then in this apt where he lives now.

301: He came to NY in '55. "Then in 1958 the mission called me here, the CT Council of Churches." In NY an assistant pastor does mainly social work. "From there, well, the mission called me to work as state chaplain for the CT Council of Churches." He worked there for a while until he went to the hospital in Newington... After he brought his family to Bristol he worked at Bristol hospital.

332: "They lived first in... the projects... after I brought them I bought... the house... My wife worked with me in Bristol Hospital. She had a low level job... she worked in the laundry, with the clothing."

364: He and his wife were together at the church in Ciales. She was 20, he was 24. "We first approached each other as friends, and as friends, well, we got to know each other, and I went to the house of her parents, who were very wealthy, owners of coffee plantations. I decided to get married. I got married in 1944... And Edna was born, and at that time they drafted me."

391: "We got married in the house, at home. My minister, the pastor, went... to the home of my future in-laws, and there we celebrated the ceremony... [We had] a little family party... and from there I went to Arecibo where my older sister was, and there I spent my honeymoon, in an Arecibo barrio."

402: He went back to Ciales. "I was an employee of the war program... In the country they had workers working on the farms... They made me... time keeper, to keep track of the peons for the weekly pay... I had to go to the fields to look for the workers." They grew vegetables.

419: "In the United States... I was also... a timekeeper. When I was a minister in Htfd, when the church council called me... I wasn't a timekeeper, it was to visit the tobacco camps as a chaplain."

437: "They called me from Htfd, CT Council of Churches. They called me to work here in Htfd. Then I brought the family [to] Htfd... To the Central Baptist Church, where I was assistant pastor. We were 3 pastors, an American, a European, and a Hispanic, me... [in] the very center of Htfd." His work as a pastor was "Celebrating evangelical meetings, weddings... canticles."

459: "In '58 there weren't many PRs [in Htfd]... In the farm camps, this was almost unpopulated by PRs. I was one of the first PRs who got established in Htfd in ministerial work [in '58]... In Htfd I had to rent housing... I lived on Orange St, then afterward Charter Oak Terrace, a housing project... From there, from Charter Oak Terrace, I went to another building in Bristol, CT, where I was a nurse... in Newington. After that I succeeded in... buying a house."

487: He lived in Htfd and then in Bristol until he took his wife to PR in '83.

500: In the farm camps he was "mainly an interpreter in the farm camps... because the workers didn't speak English... I spoke English, I was an English teacher and gave literature and help in religious worship. Visiting them, bringing them literature and... getting films... renting films to take [to] entertain them in the camps. And I brought the equipment... Also the religious services, and entertainment besides, a film of some kind."

520: "The boys came [to the] work of tobacco cultivation and they had rooms, camps where they slept, and they made their own meals. I was with them, I ate with them... But there came a time where they sent me... I had to go to... Lancaster, PA, do the same thing, chaplain of the church council... Lancaster Council of Churches." Later the job ended.

520: "They were farmers... tobacco harvest, seeing to the tobacco plants, and in the evening they returned to the camps, to make their meals and entertainment. I was in charge of the entertainment, to bring them religious services and films, and religious literature. They were very entertained. They spent peaceful nights... listening to the sermons, the religious worship, the literature, and the films."

564: [he had problems] "with the foremen, because the owners of the Shade Growers Corporation... had... foremen for the workers, to bring them in the morning to the camps, and to return in the evening. They had language problems, they didn't know English. I helped them. If there was... some misunderstanding... I looked for help from the govt of CT for the workers... I was close to a councilman, a congressman, a govt employee, and if there was a misunderstanding, well, I served as interpreter to smooth over the disagreements... [if] for some reason... they wanted to fire him, stop paying him, I went to this govt employee to smooth over the disagreement and reinstate the worker, so they wouldn't kick him out... John C. Clark, Jr, was a govt employee, and he helped me a lot."

616: In Htfd he worked as pastor, chaplain for more than 2 years. "Counselor, preacher, activities, entertainment, more or less 2 years until I resigned... I was left without work... there was an employee, a friend of mine, in a place where they employed workers, and I went where the young man was... and he got me that humble job as a porter, cleaning... [at the] Hispanic Society of America... La Sociedad Hispana. It was a bldg in Manhattan with literature and everything that has to do with Spain."

664: From there he spent another yr as a pastor in Bgt. A year as an evangelical pastor in the Disciple of Christ Church. He resigned.

681: [when he came to Hfd] "There were a lot of emotional problems among the PRs. The language, the lack of work. There was a lot of disappointment among the PRs because of the lack of work. Well as a pastor, I helped them. I went house to house, helping... There were many neglected PRs... They mistreated them... lack of work in Htfd, they had to do low level jobs... The housing projects where the PRs lived were very poor. I lived with them... in Charter Oak Terrace... with my wife and my kids." Many PRs lived there. "Maybe they had come from PR and they had worked on the farms. But they got a place to live in the projects. Charter Oak Terrace was one... but there were other places where there were PRs as well."

Side B

010: Also Glastonbury, East Htfd, Manchester had bldgs where there were PRs.

017: "If they didn't work in the agricultural camps... in tobacco... there were other vegetable farms... and I visited them too... Just outside Htfd there was a little town that I visited.. in

Windsor... and then another camp [in] Agawam... en route to MA... there were camps with PRs working, small groups in farming, vegetables."

034: "Besides making their meals, they amused themselves with literature and radio, listening to Spanish radio... The church council rented the films for me to take to them. They gave me the equipment... and besides the religious literature, I brought them supplies for their personal use."

055: [the conditions of the dormitories] "They were poor. They lived... in the cottages they had their miserable beds and very poorly, they suffered... the living and bathroom facilities were very bad [*sufrido*]. But since they were single men, there weren't women. They couldn't hire ladies... They had to take care of themselves... The family was in PR... They brought them annually by contract, the govt of PR, agricultural contract, and they picked them up in PR, they brought them to Hfd, to live in the camps and work in the tobacco farms... The PR govt announced [the jobs] throughout the island in order to bring farmworkers."

103: He remembers that the workers in PA trapped a little wild animal to cook. They also made rice, beans. He ate with them sometimes. "Here it was different. Here... Camp Bradley [had] big dining rooms."

133: When he went from house to house in Htfd, "I invited [people]... for religious services, or I brought them to the worship hall of the Central Baptist Church... I picked them up on Sunday for Bible classes. They were very affectionate, they were very good to me, and I helped them. I remember that Edna taught a children's class at Central Baptist, and I took care of the hall of worship."

145: "What happens is that these workers who went to the camps went back to PR and they brought their families later. In all those places, there were PRs. I remember Charter Oak Terrace, Charter Oak Place... Buckingham St."

153: "There was a man who was an employee of the Htfd govt... There was a place, a garden... that he took care of. And there was a man who had his store, his business, who was a govt employee... some flower gardens that are here in Htfd... And yesterday they brought the old folks in a bus... There was a grocery store, and other businesses... Don Julian Vargas... was a govt employee, of the camps... [His store was on] Ann St... and there was another Cuban who had a store of PR produce. I bought there, [from] don Julian... There were other PR places, businesses. Grocery stores, and supply [?] [*provisiones*] stores, green bananas, root vegetables, plantains... ñame and things like that... in '58. After that, they became more numerous."

204: His son Samuel was born in 1950 in PR, he lives now in Bristol, the twins in 1951, Enid and Jose Juan. All of them were born there. He brought them to NY in '55, the 5, including Naida the sick one. The apt was rented, a room for the twins, for the boys, for the girls. Edna went to live with a woman who had helped the PRs a lot when she studied at Htfd College for Women, Mrs. Betty Sunderson. But the rest lived in the house, in Charter Oak Terrace. From Charter Oak Terrace he sent them to PR, then he brought them to Bristol. They lived there until he [and his wife] returned to PR. There were other Hispanics in Bristol. There was a business, a barber. He doesn't remember the street. From Bristol the Hispanics went to Waterbury and New Britain.

276: In Httfd: "There were places of entertainment, meeting places, for dances, for family parties. Now there are more." There were more get-togethers in the houses at that time. In Bristol there was a hall that they rented for meetings, societies. "We had a Puerto Rican society... in New Britain... where we would get together. We paid dues and we had a society, a group... I joined that group when I lived in Bristol, I came to New Britain to the meetings."

308: During the Depression in PR: "the wages were very low. My father worked for 3 dollars a day... It was very poor, life in PR... When I was 16 I remember that the pay was very low, very poor. There was an economic depression during the war... the second [world] war."

324: "Some special shoes... [for] the ladies who picked coffee... [boots that his father made were for coffee workers] and the fields, since they had to walk in the fields, on the ground... Ladies' boots, and men's shoes."

338: "My mother was religious. There was a place nearby, she took us, the children, my older sister Josefina and Estelle, and me, and another boy... who died, who came to be a church worker, Eliezer Negron... My mother was very religious... an evangelical [the church was called] the Christian Alliance and Mission... Then I joined when I was 18, when I was in high school sick with malaria, I joined the Disciples of Christ Church of Ciales... I got educated there as a pastor's helper, and after that I went to school... I went to school in '45, when I left the service, with the GI Bill of Rights, I went to study at the Evangelical College... I was already married and Edna was... a baby."

376: "Hartford now is--there's a big Hispanic population that I don't know... There are a lot in the complex where I live now, this is called Shepherd Park." Another place also that has the name of an evangelical church.