Interview with Carlos Cortez
Date: May 22, 1998
Interviewer: Rick Tejada-Flores, Judith Ehrlich
Camera Rolls:
Sound Rolls:

Interview gathered as part of "The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors". Produced by Paradigm Productions. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Paradigm Productions Collection.

Interview with Carlos Cortez, conducted by Paradigm Productions on June 22, 1998 for "The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors". Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Paradigm Productions Collection.

Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in bold italics was used in the final version of "The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors".

00:00:00:00—00:00:15:00

Interviewer #1:

—clarify, we did want some of it wide shot, but we most of it on medium close.

Camera Crew Member:

[inaudible]

00:00:16:00—00:00:36:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, so this is an interview with Carlos Cortez on Friday June 21st, or Saturday—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Saturday—

Interviewer #1:

Saturday is June 22nd. Carlos let's—

Interviewer #2:

May, it's May—

Interviewer #1:

May, it is. Carlos let's start out a little bit—

Camera Crew Member #2:

What's squeaking?

Interviewer #1:

That chair. He says it's squeaking on the floor.

Interviewer #2:

[inaudible] It's gonna stop.

Carlos Cortez:

The floor.

Interviewer #1:

The floor. OK let's—

Carlos Cortez:

It's an old building.

00:00:37:00—00:02:13:00

Interviewer #1:

—let's talk a little bit about what happened before the war, and specifically about how your father and your mother influenced you when you were growing up and gave you those values that lead you to resist the draft.

Carlos Cortez:

Well my father was a traveling delegate for the Industrial Workers of the World, and was an organizer at the same time. And, coming from Milwaukee, he encountered my mother who was a Debs socialist, and for some darn reason he paid her court. Two years later he popped the question. Another two years later I came. Well my mother was a pacifist, a true pacifist, which is a bit rare. And my father, while not a pacifist, was an anti-militarist. So I grew up hearing, you know, two, two different ideologies, that is, they were much in common, but

didn't belong to the same ideological church. Anyway, I grew up as anti-war and anti-militarist. I—

Interviewer #1:

So did you—

Carlos Cortez:

—did not believe that anybody has the right to tell another man to go out and risk his life or kill somebody else, somebody he never even knew, so I decided I was gonna have no part of it. And, fortunately, my parents were very supportive of me. They supported me all the way.

00:02:14:00—00:02:28:00

Interviewer #1:

So when you talk about the different influences, and your mother being a true pacifist, does that mean that she would talk to you about people like Gandhi and what they'd done, what, I'm sorry?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Split the difference a little. Sit up just a little—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah you're too low.

Camera Crew Member #1:

—so that he doesn't look that low, and maybe could you actually rub the whole lamp?

[cut]

00:02:29:00—00:03:57:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Rolling.

Interviewer #2:

So you're talking about these two different ideologies that, that influenced you and it's, you know, I suppose pacifists would say it's not fair to say pacifism is an ideology, it's more like a philosophy. But when your mother talked about what pacifism meant to you, did she, did

she talk about things like what Gandhi was doing in India? Did that—

Carlos Cortez:

No, no, she, she respected Gandhi, but she did not know that much—

Interviewer #2:

Start of by saying— You need to say my mother respected Gandhi 'cause—

Carlos Cortez:

My, yeah. My mother respected Gandhi, but she did not, have read up to much on him, but she was always anti-war. She did not believe, in fact, I'll give you a little anecdote about her. During World War One, she was gonna send some literature to my uncle who was in camp down in Alabama. And I guess they tapped the phone or something, called her up to the federal building, and they tried to intimidate her, but found out that she wouldn't intimidate. And they said, they finally said, well young woman what you should do is get married and have a family. She says, if I have children they are going to be draft resistors. They're only too glad to end the interview.

00:03:58:00—00:05:01:00

Interviewer #1:

And, and her words came out true—

Camera Crew Member #1:

[coughs]

Interviewer #1:

—right?

Carlos Cortez:

Oh yes, yes. Well, I mean, an anti-militarist father, an anti-militarist mother, they never tried to preach to me, but I heard their conversation, and I was able to balance it with words of other people who had the opposite, and I drew my own conclusions.—

Interviewer #2:

What was...

Carlos Cortez:

—And I didn't necessarily go as a pacifist. I just couldn't see, well, ***for instance I was asked, what's the matter? you like Hitler? I says look, if you guaranteed me a shot at Hitler, you wouldn't have to draft me, but to shoot at another draftee, one who I don't even know, one who I have nothing against, no. To heck with that***. They've been doing that for the history of civilization and we still have wars, that's not the answer.

00:05:02:00—00:05:53:00

Interviewer #2:

Go ahead.

Interviewer #1:

You were saying that your father, in terms of your father's philosophy what he gave you was, was that workers shouldn't fight other workers. Talk about that a little bit.

Carlos Cortez:

Well, my father always believed, like a good I.W.W., that workers should never fight other workers. And, who, who benefits? Those who don't even get close to the bullets. They do the benefit; they reap the profits. And that's a longstanding I.W.W. philosophy, that workers should never fight each other. Yes, it was Jay Gould who said, boasted, he says I can hire one half the working class to shoot at the other half, which, in our world today, unfortunately is true.

00:05:54:00—00:05:59:00

Interviewer #2:

So let's, let's move on to—

Camera Crew Member #2:

I'm just going to adjust the mic for a second here.

Interviewer #1:

OK—

Camera Crew Member #2:

If you could just lift your head up.

[cut]

00:06:00—00:08:22:00

Interviewer #1:

So talk, give me a brief statement on how you, you applied as a CO, but you didn't get that classification, you decided you had to go to jail.

Carlos Cortez:

Well, I applied for CO status, that is, for Civilian Public Service, where you are sent to a camp to prove your sincerity, but I applied for that with my local draft board which was a suburb of Milwaukee, and they gave me 1-A-0, that is, a conscientious objector, but still a part of the military. I said no. I don't want anything to do with military. And, like many small town draft boards, they were not going to have any slackers, and usually it was the local American Legion chapter. So they, my draft notice was sentenced, I didn't show up. Few days later, the FBI came to pick me up. Nice guys, they even apologized that they had to pick me up because it was their job. Anyway, I was, spent the night in a county jail, and the next day my uncle came with my father and put up two thousand dollars of his farm to put me out on bond until my trial came up. And some months later, the trial did come up, but here's something interesting, the judge was, federal judge in the Milwaukee district was F. Ryan Duffy, he ate fish on Friday. The usual sentence he gave to conscientious objectors, draft resistors, was three years. Those who were Catholic, he gave four years. Of course, you'd think with the name Cortez, he would assume I was Catholic, except that it was in the paper that I didn't base my objection on religious grounds. He gave myself and the two other atheists that came out of Milwaukee two years. Which is kind of interesting.

00:08:23:00—00:09:16:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. Now, go back to that moment when, when the draft board offered you the 1-A-0, and you said no I can't except that. And, and you knew that, by saying that, you were going to jail. How did you feel about that moment? Did you realize what that implied for your life?

Carlos Cortez:

I realized what it implied for my life, but I didn't know what jail was. I didn't have any idea, but I knew I did not want to be in, go to war. I knew I did not want to be a part of a military organization. And, later on I believed, that prison was the only place I could be. Because, those who got deferment, they didn't have any contemporaries to associate with. Those who—

[cut]

[end of camera roll]

00:09:16:00—00:11:16:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Rolling.

Interviewer #1:

OK, if we could just start over again. Just give me a brief statement about what went through your head that moment when you said I can't accept 1-A-0.

Carlos Cortez:

I could not accept the 1-A-0 classification, because I'd still be part of a military organization, and, toward the end, I realized that I would not want CPS either, Civilian Public Service. Because, while I was up in Sandstone, Minnesota, ***there were a number of cases where the guys just walked out of the conscientious objector camps, because they couldn't stand it any longer and because many of these camps were located in a small, rural area, where the people were intensely patriotic. And some would prove their patriotism by harassing or even beating up on the guys from CPS***, and it wasn't worthwhile going into the local town anymore on their breaks. ***And I realized that, well, at the time of war, the only place for a draft resistor is to be in prison***. Of course, I was asked later, that, well supposing you were in Europe, where you either joined the army or, or you were stood up against the wall. I said, well, at the time I was young and idealistic enough to say OK, I'll take that, but now in retrospect, I said, well, I change my, I said if I have to go, I'm gonna take some of them with me. I'm not a pacifist.

00:11:17:00—00:13:13:00

Interviewer #1:

A couple other things, you were telling us that story about the other judge in, in Minnesota, in Milwaukee, the, the other one who, who compared, who, who felt that COs and draft resistors were even worse than murderers. How could a, how could a draft resistor be worse than a murderer?

Carlos Cortez:

On the other hand, ***the federal judge*** in the western district of Wisconsin lamented the fact that the maximum sentence for draft resistance was five years. He would've liked to have given more. In fact he used to lecture the guys who came up before him, conscientious objectors, Jehovah's Witnesses, would say a mur—, ***I have more respect for a murderer. He can pay his debt to society, but your debt to society will never be paid***. In other words, to him, being someone who refuses to be a soldier was worse than a murderer. There was a story I heard; it was in California. A prison happened to be near an army camp, and, well,

both the army camp and the prison were called out to fight a forest fire. So they're taking a break; three guys, one guy was from the army camp, another fellow was sent to prison for murdering a Japanese, and the other fellow was a draft resistor in prison. And the soldier says, ain't this funny? I'm here because of my job to kill Japs, this guy's in prison because he killed a Jap, and this fellow's in prison because he refuses to kill Japs.

00:13:14:00—00:14:24:00

Interviewer #1:

Certain lack of logic to that, isn't there?

Interviewer #2:

Could you go back to something you said, at the, just a few minutes ago you said, I'm not a pacifist. Do you, do you feel like you're not a, you would not define yourself as a pacifist?

Carlos Cortez:

I don't think I can define myself as a pacifist, because there's certain people I don't feel pacifistic to. But, I'm not putting down the pacifists. To be a pacifist, you have to have guts. Well you probably know about David Dellinger. He is a true pacifist. Proving his pacifist—ism, he has taken beatings, and it has harmed him physically. My mother was a true pacifist, except I think, if someone tried to harm me, she would forget her pacifism. But, it's a mother. It's a mother, it's just like nothing more peaceable than a, than a cow with her calf, but try to harm that calf.

00:14:25:00—00:15:10:00

Interviewer #1:

But, even though you're not a pacifist Carlos, you do share something with pacifists, in that you reject militarism—

Carlos Cortez:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—and military violence as a solution to countries' problems. Don't you?

Carlos Cortez:

Yeah. Well I, while I'm not a, while I do not claim to be a pacifist, I have unqualified respect for a true pacifist, 'cause I said before, to be a real pacifist takes guts. And in other countries,

where you did not have the alternative of going to prison, when it was either you become a soldier or you stand in front of firing squad, the pacifists did just that.

00:15:11:00—00:15:59:00

Interviewer #2:

But you, could you clarify your position that sent you to prison? You weren't a pacifist, but you were an anti-militarist. Is that an accurate description of your draft resistance?

Carlos Cortez:

My draft resistance is I'm an anti-militarist, also that nobody has the right, including governments, to tell someone that he should go out, take a gun to kill someone else who he didn't know, never saw, much less had any disagreement with, or be shot himself. No one has that right. It's a violation of basic dignity of human beings, of beings in period.

00:16:00:00—00:18:34:00

Interviewer #1:

Now, when you were talking about being sentenced you said, well the, the judge might have assumed that I was Catholic because my name's Cortez, the fact is that the judge probably saw very few people with names like Cortez and Martinez, because there were very few minorities who were opposed to the war. Talk a little about that, why you think that was.

Carlos Cortez:

Well a lot of it was because at that—

Interviewer #1:

A lot, say—

Carlos Cortez:

A lot, the reason there were relatively few minorities who resisted war is because there was not the big population of minorities as there is now, and, among the blacks, there were those who refused to go, and particularly there was one group called the Black Muslims. Now, the media said that they were dupes of the Black Dragon Society, or of, but most of them were older men who'd been in the first world war and saw what it was. They experienced coming home to have someone shout at 'em, nigger take of that uniform. You don't deserve to wear it. Among 'em were young people too, but they were under the influence of the old veterans. Unfortunately among other minorities there was more trying to prove that they were just as good as the whites, as the dominant culture. At that time, most of the Mexicans wanted to prove that they were good Americans. I said if I have to be a member of the Army to prove

I'm a good American, to heck with it. I'll be a good something else.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

Carlos Cortez:

And it was bec—, it was unfortunately because, I think it was a lack of information too. Let me repeat one little incident. I, I was at a tavern, after it was all over. I run into some Indian fellow, American Indian, and he wanted to know where I was in the war. I told him. I said I wasn't in the war; I told him the reason why. And he's looking at me, no shit, no shit, why in the hell couldn't I have done something like that? 'Cause some people didn't know there was such a thing as alternative.

00:18:35:00—00:19:50:00

Interviewer #1:

Well that's an interesting point, because when you look at who were COs, most of them were college educated, well educated people who knew, had more access to information—

Carlos Cortez:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—so you think the fact that minorities didn't have information.

Carlos Cortez:

Part of it was that the fact that the minorities did not have the educational opportunities that most of the classic draft resistors did, because they, well the draft resistors I was among up in Sandstone, they were a lot of college graduates. I was one of the few that was only a high school graduate. And one thing that rankled the prison authorities, they used to give an intelligence test, comparing the intelligence average of the prison population with that of the prison staff. It was fifty-fifty, but after the draft resistors, the intelligence average of the prison staff was below [laughs] those of the prisoners, and it, of course, rankled the prison staff and administration.

00:19:51:00—00:21:50:00

Interviewer #1:

Now, the other story you told me when we were talking the other day about this issue, about

how minorities felt about the war, was you were in the Hod Carriers, or it was the laborers then, and you were saying you were talking to some black fellow workers down at the hall about the fact that they were gonna go in, but they weren't sure why they were going in, and it didn't make any difference to them. Tell me a little bit about that.

Carlos Cortez:

Well, I used to belong to the Hod Carriers, local from Milwaukee, nowadays known as Laborers International. And I would be talking to some of the black dudes. In fact, right after Pearl Harbor, the news was all about Pearl Harbor and everybody stood up, held their hats over their, their hearts, except in one corner the blacks were sitting down. And I says, I walks over to 'em, says you know I admire you guys, you've got the courage to keep on sitting. He says well, that song ain't gonna do us any good when the bombs start falling. And one young fellow said well, I know I have nothing against the Japanese, I know I'm going to get drafted, I'm gonna have to kill Japanese, but as far as how this war comes out, I couldn't care less. In fact, I guess the day after Pearl Harbor, my father, belongs to the same union, was accosted in the men's room by a bunch of blacks, go, who knows maybe now we're gonna get a break. We didn't get any break off of, off the whites here in the United States, maybe the Japanese will treat us better. That was a general attitude, but somehow it didn't occur to resist.

00:21:51:00—00:23:04:00

Interviewer #1:

Now I've gotta say the other side of the coin is that, you know if you, if you look at the way Hitler treated minorities, and he had won, probably minorities would've faired fairly badly under that philosophy. Don't you think?

Carlos Cortez:

Oh yeah, yeah. Well, Hitler was only a little bit more extreme than the establishment was here regarding minorities. In fact, in World War Two, segregation was still rife in the military. It was only after the end of World War Two that there was a movement and resistance of minorities in the military. A. Philip Randolph, who was the head of the Sleeping Car Porters union, said that he wants to initiate passive resistance, that blacks shouldn't join a Jim Crow army. Of course, Randolph was a socialist too, and very much a labor skate [sic].

00:23:05:00—00:23:58:00

Interviewer #2:

Sorry, how were, were Mexicans Americans treated, and other Latin American Americans, treated in, in terms of that in the military. Were they, were they in segregated units or were they integrated into the regular units?

Carlos Cortez:

Well, and, there was one exception, one that Mexicans and American Indians and Orientals were not segregated the way blacks were. And, of course, these minorities were given the illusion that they had a break; there's somebody that they were above, and, unfortunately, many who took advantage of that, and, to prove that they were good Americans by being anti-black. Not withstanding the fact—

Interviewer #1:

[coughs]

Carlos Cortez:

—that there was black admixture among many Mexicans.

00:23:59:00—00:28:18:00

Interviewer #2:

Carlos could you take us to Sandstone and describe what that was like, and what you talked about the diversity of people that were there, and what they believed?

Interviewer #1:

And sort of set the scene. You arrived at the prison. You didn't know what to expect. I mean you, you had an idea about, you know, gangster movies and going to jail, so what, what was it really like when you got there?

Interviewer #2:

And also if you could mention how you were. I don't think you talked about what age you were at this time.

Carlos Cortez:

Well, when my trial came up and I was sentenced, I was still twenty. And I spent a few weeks in the county jail, finally my time came up, I was picked up, I was taken by the marshals with some other guys on the train, and dropped off at Sandstone, Minnesota. I don't know what I, what to expect, but I found out that most of the people at this prison were draft cases, draft resistance. There was like [coughs], between eighty and ninety Black Muslims, and some ninety to a hundred assorted conscientious objectors from various reasons, like traditional anti-war churches like the Quakers, to other pacifists, to socialists, and those who based their anti-war on humanitarian grounds. Then the rest, I guess some four hundred, were Jehovah's Witnesses, that is, they would go if they were given status as a chaplain, 'cause everyone considered themselves a minister of go—gospel. Then there was one dormitory that was called the honest thieves, that is, they weren't there on draft violation, but it was also war

related. It was usually like counterfeiting ration tickets, or violating ration act, or having some kind of ration, you know, racketeer black market, racketeer. And there was another category they called impersonation. Impersonation, at that time, was the unauthorized wearing of the military uniform. It would usually be some young dudes who wanted to pick up girls, and they'd put on a uniform, usually their fathers' World War One uniform, to go and impress the girls, which was rather stupid because there was a difference between the two uniforms, they were just never spotted by shore patrol. The funny thing was they pointed out the young kid, of course the minimum age to be in a federal joint was eighteen, well this guy looked like he wasn't sixteen yet. They told me when they picked him up he was wearing a full major's uniform. [laughs] And it was, it, it was a corker. And there was the other group who—

Interviewer #1:

[coughs]

Carlos Cortez:

—were, they called them, referred to them as negligent violators. They were the guys who kept one jump ahead of the draft board, but when they were finally caught up with they became patriotic say, oh give me a chance to join the army. Well the federal judge whoever or the army figured out, they're not gonna be good soldiers anyway, send 'em up to the joint. Well those were the super patriots, they would say, this was a mistake. I tried to join the Army, especially if they saw some young Jehovah's Witness, they'd tell 'em, kid look up at me how, how about you, I says yeah I tried to join the service my self, but the WACs wouldn’t accept me. The WACs were the women's army core.

00:28:19:00—00:29:06:00

Interviewer #2:

You didn't say this just now but you said it before—

Interviewer #1:

[coughs]

Interviewer #2:

—You were saying that there were the Muslims, and there were the Jehovah's Witnesses, and then there were sixty-seven ideologies in the other dorm right—

Interviewer #1:

Just talk about all the, yeah.

Carlos Cortez:

Oh yeah, somebody, somebody asked us, my dormitory where I was were assorted conscientious objectors. The gamut from religious pacifists, to socialists, to those who were just anti-militarist. So we're asked by somebody from one of the other dormitories, how many ideologies are there in your dormitory? Well, our dormitory has something like sixty-seven. It's like, well, sixty-seven ideologies.

00:29:07:00—00:30:02:00

Interviewer #2:

What was that like? Did you talk a lot about your ideology? Did—

Interviewer #1:

Did you fight it out?

Interviewer #2:

—was it an opportunity to clarify your thinking about things and talk to others?

Carlos Cortez:

Well, the result, there was many discussions, arguments, and crossing of ideological swords, which I think was beneficial to all. It was exposure to, to fields of thought that, say, a dedicated socialist hadn't heard before, or a dedicated pacifist hadn't heard before. We even had some interesting discussions with some of the Jehovah's Witnesses. And they would say, yeah, yeah, yeah, well, you know what he said, oh, don't listen to him, he's demonized. He doesn't have the truth.

00:30:02:00—00:31:02:00

Interviewer #2:

Was there a camraderie though, that you had different ideologies, but there was a sense of belonging to the, a group of, if nonconformists can belong to a group, did you have that sense of belonging?

Carlos Cortez:

Yet, at the same time, there was a camraderie among all those who were, went up on draft resistance. 'Cause we realized we had one thing in common, that we wanted no part of war, we wanted no part of the military, and even though we may have disagreed with the bible-thumping Jehovah's Witnesses, or with some of the rabid Leninists, we, we figured well, we have the same enemies, the same adversaries. So there was this bit of camaraderie that

existed, although it never, unfortunately never resulted in any unified action on the part of—

00:31:03:00—00:32:41:00

Interviewer #1:

Well let's talk a little about that period after the war. I mean you look back now, this is, you know everybody's real nostalgic about World War Two, celebrating all those big band songs and all that. But, but it, I guess my question is, was that experience in taking that stand and being in prison, was that an important moment in your life? Did it really change things, or do you look at it as some, as a, as, you came out of it a different person?

Carlos Cortez:

I don't believe I came out a different person. When I was, came out of prison, I had the experience of prison. It was a minimum custody institution, and it wasn't bad compared to some other places, particularly the state joints. But, a prison is a prison. You know you're stuck, you're not going anywhere, and you do time. And, coming out of prison, a lot of the guys who before said, you're never gonna find a job once you get out. I remember my father saying to his construction crew, because he was looking, he says, my son is coming out of prison, he was there for resisting the draft. Well bring him over we need some more workers. And I told you about the, the Indian dude who says, I'll be darned why didn't I think of that.

00:32:42:00—00:33:41:00

Interviewer #1:

And you also told me that, that your dad said that that's sort of the mark of growing of age in America is doing time. Right? Tell me that.

Carlos Cortez:

My father had said, at the time, he says, well son, you're not a real citizen until you've been in jail. He says, but you know, organizing for the I.W.W., I've been in a lot of county joints, even got close to getting in the state joint, but my boy got me beat he's hitting the federal joint right away. So he thought, there was a bit of status, in fact we knew a couple of old socialists who came from Czechoslovakia. They were Sudeten Germans. Said, ah yeah, in Europe if anyone has anything on the ball, they did some time.

00:33:42:00—00:34:35:00

Interviewer #1:

So it's a badge of honor.

Carlos Cortez:

Yeah. It was a b—, a badge of honor among some people, in fact, later on, many people looked upon this as a badge of honor, they admired me for it. In fact, only a few years ago, young Chicanos was, were sitting at a booth at one of the neighborhood fairs hustling our artwork. And he says to his young kid who was only, I think he was about six or seven, Carlos, I want you to tell my son what you did during the war. That was the difference between the Mexicans of my generation, and the young ones today. Gotten a little bit more educated.

00:34:36:00—00:35:49:00

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm. Could you tell that story again about your friend who said that you were fighting a war in your own way?

Carlos Cortez:

When my case was going through the court, after the FBI had picked me up, they went around to the neighbors, to the union where I worked through, interviewed them. And some of the jobs I'd been on, some of the patriots would blow their stack, you, you mean I had one of these guys working for me. And they went to some friends who were socialist, in fact the father, both the father and mother were in the I.W.W. that later became socialist party, and they had a son in the army. And, the FBI said, how do you feel towards this man? You have a son in the Army and this man refuses to go in the Army. And she said, well, he's fighting for his country in his way. That was her way of looking at it. And the guy was flabbergasted he didn’t know [laughs] what to say.

00:35:50:00—00:38:42:00

Interviewer #1:

Because that's, that's, something that's, that's always brought up is, is don't, don't you feel a sense of responsibility, you know, a responsible person will do what his country says, and if his country says kill, he'll kill. So the question is, for you, how do you define that sense of responsibility to what you believe in?

Carlos Cortez:

I've been asked many times, don't you feel any sense of responsibility to your country? You're biting the hand that feeds you. I says, who's biting whose hand? I says, I'm working, I pay taxes, I build the roads, erect the buildings. I says, I'm doing something constructive. When I become a soldier, I am destructive. Because, after all, they're going to say the same things to the soldiers under Hitler or under Mussolini. No matter what war it is, they're, they're right. You know, this whole saying, my country right or wrong, my country. When the country asks me to do something wrong, that's no longer my country. I used to say to

some of these patriots, when they say, do you know, do you love your country? I says, yes, I love this country, but I think I would love other countries too, and other people. Why should I go out and kill 'em? And after all, I said to him, look, after the war is over and both armies have their casualties and everything, who is fat and sassy? The ones who never got close to the war; the ones who told others they should go and fight. It reminded me of a ditty we had improvised up in jail, and you'll excuse my voice, but it was, it goes like this: [sings] "It was on a Saturday night, when the moon was shining bright, that they passed the conscription bill. [plane flying over] And for many miles around, the people they would say, it's Franklin and his boys on Capitol Hill. Well President Roosevelt, told the people how he felt, and they damn near believed what he'd say. He says I hate war, so does Eleanor, and the farmer hauled another load away [plane flying over]."

00:38:43:00—00:38:59:00

Interviewer #1:

How unhappy are you with the plane? Very? Yes, we need to, we need to sing the song over one more time. When the pl—, just, just as you started singing, the plane started flying.

Camera Crew Member #2:

[inaudible] It's a big jet.

Interviewer #2:

[inaudible] OK. That's great. We'll do two takes on the song. [inaudible]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Juan record what—

[cut]

[end of camera roll]

00:39:00:00—00:40:17:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Rolling.

Interviewer #1:

OK, sing us the song one, tell us the story, you sang, you composed this song in jail.

Carlos Cortez:

Up in the prison, we did a lot of parodies of songs [coughs]. There was one to the, that the guys improvised. I won't take credit for it. I'll only take credit for the last line. It was a parody of Jesse James. You'll excuse my lack of operatic voice: "***It was on a Saturday night, when the moon was shining bright, that they passed the conscription bill. And for many miles around, the people they would say, its Franklin and his boys on Capitol Hill. Well President Roosevelt, told the people how he felt, and they damn near believed what he'd say. He says I hate war, so does Eleanor, and the farmer hauled another load away***." The last line was mine.

00:40:18:00—00:41:38:00

Interviewer #1:

That's good. Does this lead us into the poems?

Interviewer #2:

Yeah I think so, exactly, there's some similarity to that and the dog poem. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

Hound dog, yes, yes. Let's do hound dog. OK.

Carlos Cortez:

Well I did one poem. I read one of Ferlinghetti's poems, “Dog”, and I got the inspiration for this; [reads] "Hound Dog," "Trotting along the sidewalk with not a feline in sight to give chase to, and not a girl doggy in sight that he can peruse. But, just the same, as happy as only a hound dog can be. He espies the recruiting poster in front of the post office. His tail stops wagging long enough, as he cranes his head forward to make the sniff test. And upon seeing that it does not sniff too well, with excellent body English and a back paw salute, he administers upon this artifact, of an alleged higher creation, his most eloquent appraisal."

Interviewer #2:

Do you want to do that again?

Interviewer #1:

[coughs]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Well, if, if he could read it closer. Can you, ca—

[cut]

00:41:39:00—00:42:44:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, go ahead.

Carlos Cortez:

[reads] "Hound Dog: Trotting along the sidewalk with not a feline in sight to give chase to, and not a girl doggy in sight that he can peruse. But, just the same, as happy as only a hound dog can be. He espies the recruiting poster in front of the post office. His tail stops wagging long enough, as he cranes his head forward to make the sniff test. And upon seeing that it does not sniff too well, with excellent body English and a back paw salute, he administers upon this artifact, of an alleged higher creation, his most eloquent appraisal."

Interviewer #2:

Can we just—

Interviewer #1:

Hang on one sec. Are you happy with that?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Well it's better than before—

[cut]

00:42:45:00—00:44:21:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Again, as close as possible to you.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, Vicente can you get that? Can you zoom in close on that image.

Interviewer #1:

Hang on I want a picture of this.

[camera shutter sounds]

Camera Crew Member #1:

Go ahead.

Carlos Cortez:

[reads] "What happened to Armistice Day? Perhaps a gold star can sooth a mother's aching heart, and give solace to a father's broken dreams. Perhaps a gold star can bring home the bacon and be a companion to a widowed young wife, and lie at night between her yearning loins, to stofle [sic], stifle, nocturnal sobs. Perhaps a gold star can be a good pal to those orphaned kids, and play with them in the evening, and drive them to school in the morning, as they await their time to audition for gold stars of their own. Perhaps a gold star can proliferate and multiply, until there are so many that Fort Knox will be just another hole in the ground, and the parasites can have a real ball pointing with pride. But I don't think you ought to worry too much about gold stars anymore, you see, war is being automated."

00:44:22:00—00:44:44:00

Interviewer #2:

Should we do that again? Just 'cause there was a little stumble in it. It would be nice if we could—

Interviewer #1:

What, you want

Interviewer #2:

—do a retake of it—

Interviewer #1:

—I really like the poem.

Interviewer #1:

Could you read that one more—

Interviewer #2:

Could you do that one more time? and do it short—

Camera Crew Member #2:

Is that the end of the poem?

Interviewer #1:

Yeah that was, yeah.

Carlos Cortez:

Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah read that one more time.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah and do it in close-up.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Here's where we don't talk.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Hold it, and—

Interviewer #1:

Hold on one sec. Now.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK.

[cut]

00:44:45:00—00:47:09:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Go.

Carlos Cortez:

[reads] "What happened to Armistice Day? Perhaps a gold star can sooth a mother's aching heart, and give solace to a father's broken dreams. Perhaps a gold star can bring home the

bacon and be a companion to a widowed young wife, and lie at night between her yearning loins, to stifle nocturnal sobs. Perhaps a gold star can be a good pal to those orphaned kids, and play with them in the evening, and drive them to school in the morning, as they await their time to audition for gold stars of their own. Perhaps a gold star can proliferate and multiply, until there are so damn many that Fort Knox will be just another hole in the ground, and the parasites can have a real ball pointing with pride. But I don't think you ought to worry too much about gold stars anymore, you see, war is being automated." [turns page] [reads] "Ballad of a Draftee: He didn't know what it was all about. Just out of school, and no job, and nowhere to go nor anything to go with, so when the board told him that he was going to travel far, naturally he was thrilled. With a spanking new uniform and shiny new gun, he got on the big boat and began to see the world. Months later, in a steamy hot miserable jungle, sweat pouring down his face, and his crotch full of lice, he still didn't quite know what it was all about. Nor could he understand why these people, whose freedom he was sent to protect, were shooting at him. And when he felt the impact of the bullet, in his last split second of consciousness, he began to wonder."

00:47:10:00—00:57:52:00

Interviewer #1:

Good. I like that.

Interviewer #2:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

So let's just talk a couple more things. One is with this, this issue of how commitment to solving processes and, and making change peacefully and nonviolently has played out in the years after the war. And I'm thinking specifically about, about the labor movement [car passes] because you come out of the labor movement—

Carlos Cortez:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—and talk a little bit about how nonviolence [car passes] has worked in, in labor.

Camera Crew Member #2:

There's a car in there.

Interviewer #1:

Hang on, let's wait. [car passes]

Camera Crew Member #2:

Steep parking. [car passes]

Interviewer #1:

Bye-bye car.

00:57:53:00—00:50:01:00

Interviewer #1:

OK.

Carlos Cortez:

Well, to me, as having been in the labor movement along with my father, and then, after the war, having joined my father's old union, the I.W.W., I feel there is anti-militarism and the labor movement have something very much in common. Unfortunately, much of the respectable labor movement, the business unions, are patriotic as hell, and supported the war effort, even supported the Contras, but I still believe in like the I.W.W., who said that workers should not shoot at each other. And as for, even for, violent revolution, Big Bill Haywood was challenged: Are you out to overthrow the government? He says no, we don't want to overthrow the government, just give the factories and the jobs, put 'em in the hands of the workers themselves, let them administer their own jobs, their own factories, and you can put your government in your best pocket. Because what controls our society, our lives, is controlled at the point of production. Those who own the big industries and everything, they're the ones who decide whether our presidents or prime ministers are gonna declare war and initiate a draft act. And, that was one of the things that endeared me to the I.W.W.

00:50:02:00—00:53:02:00

Interviewer #1:

You're wearing some buttons right now—

Carlos Cortez:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—which relate to another nonviolent labor—

Carlos Cortez:

I am, yes. I do not belong to the United Farm Workers. I, been, did some support work for 'em, and there were those who criticize Cesar Chavez for his Gandhian approach, but, as I said before, for a true pacifist I have unqualified respect. And I agreed with Chavez who said that, we shouldn't resort to violence, we're only bringing ourselves to the level of those who use violence against us. In fact, it was Cesar Chavez, at the time of one big strike in California among the agricultural workers, sent representatives across the border to these guys who were waiting, ready to hop across the border and told, look, if you wait a while before coming across, if you come across now, you're only going to break our strike, but if you wait a while and we win this strike, you're gonna benefit. Now you can imagine, here were guys when they hop across the border illegally, coming into a strange environment, a hostile environment, not knowing the language, it's economic desperation. And yet, this man and his colleagues were able to convince them to hold off. I mean this is, you might say there's something spiritual about it, although I don't claim to be a spiritual person. But I do believe that, when you're in the labor movement, you can't just think of your own group of workers or the group of workers who share your geographical location, you have to think of terms of workers the world over. Because, well, don't forget, the auto worker in Detroit has more in common with the auto worker in Japan than either have with their own political representatives. The wheat farmer in Kansas has got more in common interest with the wheat farmer in Russia than either have with their own political representatives and, after all, their, their own political representatives really represent the interests of th—, of a, of the other class an—

00:53:03:00—00:55:02:00

Interviewer #1:

So the world, the world hasn't changed, has it? I think that's what you're saying.

Carlos Cortez:

No, it, well it's a long time of changing, but I see some hope. See when, during the years, during World War Two, when I sent up for draft resistance, everyone who was sent up on draft resistance, they were spread all over the paper. Look at these slackers. Korean War came along, they didn't. And the Vietnam War they didn't even bother sentencing the guys unless they made too much noise, and then, maybe it was only for six months. Well I'm proud to say that, I was at one time an editor of the Industrial Worker, the organ of the I.W.W. I'm proud to say that a success of editors have gone to jail for refusing to take part in the military. During World War One, quite a few Wobblies went to jail. And prior to my going up to Sandstone, another editor who had, was a volunteer with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade later became an anti-militarist, a conscientious objector, was in the same joint I was. He became editor for a short time. Then when I was, long after, I became editor of the industrial worker. And a young dude who I prepared to take over for me as editorship, he spent six months during the Vietnam War.

00:55:03:00—00:55:58:00

Interviewer #1:

The, the torch has been passed.

Carlos Cortez:

So, I think we've got a good track record. And the fact that they estimated the draft resistors in the millions during the Vietnam War shows there was, I think there's hope for the human race. A friend of mine once asked me, when I was a, addressing a college audience, how can you have any hope after, you know, all these, the history of one war after the other. I says, the redeemable thing about our species is, no war was ever fought with volunteers. Unless it's revolutions and, of course, revolutions are not a respectable war.

Interviewer #1:

I think we'll stop there.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:55:58:00