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Oral History Interview
TAPE LOG

Please note that this is not a literal transcript. Many of the questions and answers are paraphrased and abridged.

Interviewee: Jules Rivera, Ph.D. candidate in Educational Leadership
Interviewers: Robert Serow, Professor, Education Research, NCSU College of Ed.
Anna Dahlstein, NCSU Libraries Fellow, Special Collections
Date: February 3, 2004
Location: Poe Hall 608p
Length: Approx. 40 minutes

Side A

000 Dahlstein: Introductory information (same as above)

012 Dahlstein: Please state your complete name and date of birth.
Rivera: My name is Jules Rivera. I was born Sept. 5, 1932 in Brooklyn, NY.

018 Dahlstein: What were your parents' names and occupations?

Rivera: My mother's name was Zoila Rodriguez (maiden name). She was an auto driving instructor in Brooklyn, NY, back in the day when you couldn't pass on the right... [Smiles.] She taught people how to drive. My father's name was Jules C. Rivera, Sr. He was born in Puerto Rico. His father was from Mallorca in Spain and my mother's grandparents [*amendment: maternal grandparents, i.e. mother's parents*] were from Galicia in Spain.

034 Dahlstein: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Rivera: Yes, I have a slew of them... Sylvia, who lives in Florida now. Sylvia Rosetti is her married name. Elizabeth Rodriguez (married name) lives in Teaneck, New Jersey. My brother René lives in Miami, Florida. He's an engineer.

056 Dahlstein: Are you the oldest, the youngest, or...?

Rivera: I'm the oldest.

057 Dahlstein: Could you please tell us where you went to high school?

Rivera: I went to high school in Hastings-on-Hudson, in Westchester County, New York. At the time, my father was working in South America and he put me in a private school. He didn't want me to on the streets of New York so he put me up in a place called Graham School. The building is still there, but the organization is not. It was founded by Mrs. Alexander Hamilton in 1808, I think it was. In the boardroom they used to have all their pictures around the wall, you know... These were very distinguished ladies [lists names] – you know, women of that era. I didn't appreciate the school very much then, as much as I do now. It taught me how to speak English. From a very early age, I learned how to speak English without an accent. I learned to think as an Anglo-Saxon thinks, and that has been invaluable to me.

078 Dahlstein: Had your parents completed high school here in the United States? Did they grow up in the United States?

Rivera: My mother finished high school in the Caribbean, and then she came to the United States. My father went to Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn. He was one of the original [students], when the school was brand new.

Serow: It's the second oldest public school in the United States.

Rivera: I didn't know that. Yeah, my father played baseball in Erasmus Hall and a lot of those guys joined the National Guard and went up to the Andirondacks every summer. He worked as a – This is a long story; I don't know if you want to hear it... After the First World War, they started going from botanicals to pharmaceutical drugs. ... When you finished high school in those days, back in the 20s, there were no community colleges. You had to do a two-year, what they called a postgrad course in the high school. So he took two additional years at the high school, PG, and got a bookkeeping degree, diploma, certificate, whatever it was.

At the height of the Depression, he was working at a rouge factory in Brooklyn and he got laid off so he went to – took twenty-five dollars out of the mattress and went down to the employment agency and paid twenty-five dollars for a job and ended up with one of the Davis brothers. There were five Davis brothers and their father financed them into pharmaceuticals. Things were changing, there was a paradigm shift and he wanted the sons to – So my father got picked up as an accountant for Davis & Lawrence. ... He started a bookkeeper there and he used to commute every morning from Brooklyn, New York to Dobbs Ferry on the Grand Central, every morning... He worked with them for a long time.

In 1939 or '40, they sent him down to South America because he could speak Spanish, he was fluent in Spanish, and he was sent down there to put these pharmaceuticals on the market. There was no pharmaceutical market down there at that time. And he got on the ground floor, selling pharmaceuticals down there. He sold pharmaceuticals through the sixties, but unfortunately he – When the old man Davis died, there was a company shift and he didn't do too well in that company shift. So he had to start his own company. He started a little factory in Guatemala where he could – He had one chemist working for him and he'd produce a certain amount of cough drops and aspirin and a lot of those things... He had his own brand. He was instrumental in introducing the birth control pill in Central America. When he died, he left a lot of money. I didn't get any of it, but my brother got it. [Smiles]

145 Dahlstein: What year did you graduate from high school yourself?

Rivera: I graduated in 1949.

146 Dahlstein: And at that time, did you know what you wanted to do with your life, whether it was to continue to go to school, or pursue a particular profession...?

Rivera: Well, let me explain, if I can: At the time that I graduated from high school, World War II had just been over, you know? There was a different mind-set in the country. People thought differently. There is nowhere anywhere in this society today that we can reflect what people thought at that time. It was a different society. I followed World War II – it started when I was very young and I was about fourteen when it ended. I followed the papers every week. I used to walk down Court St. in Brooklyn reading the World War II progress reports on the windows, etc. It was different, very different. I had always thought of joining the Marine Corps – not because of any GI Bill benefits or anything else. I was very concerned and very appreciative of the sacrifice made in World War II and I wanted to be a part of that. I really wanted to be a part of that, because that's what I grew into. I grew up in that. A lot of people grew up in that.

So I joined the Marine Corps in '49, December the first, 1949. That's what I wanted to be, I wanted to be a Marine, and I became one. And there were times I regretted it – Personally, it wasn't always favorable, but I survived it. That's what I did for twenty-five years. Then I worked in the state government in the Planning Section, in Crime Control Policy. And then, after that – I hope I'm not saying too much now?

179 Dahlstein: No, on the contrary, I wanted to follow up with a question: During your time in the Marine Corps, where were you stationed?

Rivera: Well, I was in Korea. I don't know if you know the units – the units are very important, because that's what makes the organization. There are units that are meaningful – and then some that are not, you know, but... I was in the First

Batallion, Fifth Marines Infantry in Korea, and I was in the Second Batallion Third Marines Infantry in Vietnam. And the second time I was there, I was in the SLF, the Special Landing Force – I was with them for a while. Those are my three major assignments. I had a lot of other assignments, but they were not as meaningful as those were.

I worked my way up in the ranks. I was enlisted for nine years and then in 1958 there was a tremendous shortage in officers coming in from outside, from the universities, from the colleges and from the OCS classes. So they had to dip down to the enlisted ranks and pick some up so they had a full quota for that year. And I was fortunate to be picked. They picked 105 out of the whole Marine Corps. Out of the 105, there was a 35 percent attrition. I stayed. I was enlisted for nine years and I was commissioned for fifteen years.

204 Dahlstein: And your rank at that time was...?

Rivera: Well, I [started as a] second lieutenant and fifteen years later, I retired as a major. That was the extent of my service.

209 Dahlstein: Upon retiring from the Marines, did you have a plan of action? What did you decide to do?

Rivera: I have to be honest with you. I had planned to come back to school because I hadn't had any education, really. I took a course here, a course there. When I was stationed in Okinawa, I didn't waste my time. I took a lot of courses in Japanese history, the cultural geography of China and Japan and Southeast Asia from professors in the University of Maryland Overseas. A lot of the courses were pertinent to what we were doing. I transferred a lot of these [credits] to State University of New York, and took some additional courses up there and got my degree after I got out. It's hard to put things together when you're moving around like that.

226 Dahlstein: Transferring credits from one school to another?

Rivera: Yeah. I was teaching at Quantico, the officer basic course. When I was teaching there, I would take courses at night at the Pentagon, up the road. That was again [through] the University of Maryland. ... I was education starved when I got out. I really needed it. Because my basic education as a young boy had been very thorough, at the school that my father had put me into. I was there for seven years, from the age of ten to the age of seventeen, and it was really a good education. We had Latin in the eighth grade. It was the traditional, classic education. I didn't realize at the time that it was very valuable. I can still recite some of the conjugations in Latin... [recites]

And then when I went in the Marine Corps, I had no education whatsoever, for all those years I was there – just took courses. Not on the GI Bill; it was under

Tuition Assistance. It's a different program where they assist you to go to college while you're on active duty. You take one course at a time. I took a lot of those courses. When I got out, I was having some marital problems. That's why I got out -- I would have stayed longer, but you just can't take it from both sides, you know. You can't take it from the Marine Corps and from your soulmate at the same time, so I had to get away from that. I got out to keep my marriage together but it didn't work. I think I made the right decision.

But I needed an education so I went to Puerto Rico for a year. I studied at what they call World University, established by Dr. Lorraine Casby. She had five Ph.Ds -- three from the University of Nebraska (Psychology, Sociology and Political Science), one in Economics (from Cambridge in England) and one in Philosophy (from New Delhi). I did some student teaching under her. But it was a very bad experience in that -- I'm not a native speaker, really. What I picked up was at home, and the nature of language is that you only use five or six hundred words every day, like eat, sleep, bathroom, you know... At the professional level, you've got to learn like 10,000 or 20,000 words; it's a different atmosphere. I was in the process of doing that. I was picking up very quickly. But I would make one mistake in class, and boy, they would roll in the aisles -- particularly since I was what I was. They would say: "He looks like a gringo, he cuts his hair like a gringo, he talks, he thinks like a gringo." There was a lot of that, an awful lot of that.

287 Dahlstein: What was your course of study?

Rivera: Philosophy of Government. She [Casby] taught most of the classes. She had founded the university and brought some of her own money into it. There were three professors from the University of Nebraska there -- her and two of her colleagues.

292 Dahlstein: Did you stay long enough to earn a degree?

Rivera: I earned a degree in the Philosophy of Government. I couldn't stay longer because my thinking was beginning to change. My mindset was beginning to -- Well, you lived in Argentina; you know what it's like. Especially if you're raised as an American and think as an American, to go into a situation and find yourself being shifted, you know? It's not really what you want. So I returned to the States. I came back to North Carolina and I worked in Tobacco for a while, for the old Imperial Tobacco Company, the original British company. Then I started teaching. I taught at Carteret Community College.

305 Dahlstein: What year was this, more or less?

Rivera: 1975. I taught there for three years full-time. Then I went to Craven Community College and I taught there for two years part-time. Then I went back to get my Master's at East Carolina.

308 Serow: What were you teaching?

Rivera: The peripheral subjects of Criminal Justice – by peripheral, I mean state and local government, national government, juvenile delinquency, criminology. Not the hard-core police subjects but the peripheral subjects, the academic subjects. Then I finally went to get my Master's at East Carolina, in 1977. I worked with Dr. Avtar Singh. He and I did a lot of fieldwork. We would develop an instrument and I would take it to the field and apply it and then quantify it.

322 Dahlstein: In the field of Education?

Rivera: No, it was mostly sociological. One of the things that occurred was that the studies that we did were going to be published, and they were eventually, but a lot of the things that I did for him, I was the second author and he was the first author. He was very good to me. I see him every now and then. He's still there, still teaching. He's from the Punjab in India.

331 Dahlstein: Were you using GI Bill funds at this point, to finance your Master's?

Rivera: Yes. I used GI Bill in Puerto Rico; I used GI Bill for the Master's; I used GI Bill for the Ed.S. (Education Specialization) degree above the Master's. They didn't have a Ph.D. or Ed.D. program but they had a program above the Master's called the Ed.S. program, having to do with certification for the public school system. I didn't pursue that; I just obtained the degree.

338 Dahlstein: Did the availability of GI Bill funds affect your decision to go back to school? What role did they play in your decision-making?

Rivera: I think the decision we [Dr. Serow and I, in our interviews with GI Bill beneficiaries] have asked is, "Would you have gone to school if you had the GI Bill or not?" Of course, people say, "I would have gone to school whether I had the GI Bill or not." And I'm tempted to say the same thing – but you know, realistically, there's a big difference, monetarily. Going back to school with money or going back to school with no money... So yes, it was instrumental. I had to collect that money before it ran out.

346 Serow: You were entitled to the GI Bill under two different wars, were you not? So which benefits did you get – did you get the Korean War benefits or the Vietnam War benefits?

Rivera: They had a system where they melded the two programs. If you went to school on the Korean War, you had a certain amount of time, ten years. By the time I started school, that was all over – it was gone. But it wasn't a complete loss, because if you had Vietnam and Korean War eligibility, what they did was, they allowed you to take 48 months of school – that's 48 divided by nine, over

five years of school. So they were very good with me about that. It ran out and I still didn't get to use ten months of it... One of these days I'm going to go up there and knock on somebody's forehead and say, "Can I still do my ten months?" [Laughs]

360 Dahlstein: What year does that bring us to, when you had completed your Master's?

Rivera: 1983 – I was doing a lot of running back and forth, teaching and taking courses. I did the Ed.S. in one year and got out in 1984. Then I applied for a job with the state government and they took me. I moved up here to the Planning Section of Crime Control and Public Safety. I did a lot of planning there; I wrote just about every plan they needed. I used to spend a lot of time in the Archives, making sure that I wasn't writing in isolation. You just can't write things in isolation – when you write something sitting in a corner, looking at the wall, you're writing fairy tales... You have to make sure that what you're writing is what's out there. I did a lot of traveling, a lot of writing.

I retired from that in '92. I had married again and my wife was very sick. She needed some medical attention. I didn't want to end up with a lot of bills, so I went to Israel for a year and paid the bills. When I came back, she died. I was in Honduras for a little while, in a place called Juticalpa, in the province of Olancho and I worked with the bishop down there, the Catholic bishop.

381 Dahlstein: What were you doing?

Rivera: I was doing missionary work. But it didn't work out. Before that, I had applied for this program [at the College of Education at NCSU.] When I was in state government, I had been going to the O.Ed. [*Occupation Education*] Program. Just before my wife died, I applied to this program here. [*Leadership*] After she died, I was just completely disoriented, so I went to Honduras for a while. When I came back, I came to the program full-time.

389 Dahlstein: So now you've been full-time here for how many years?

Rivera: Too many! [Laughs] I guess I started here in 1986, my first course in Oc. Ed. [*Occupational Education.*] But I just couldn't do it because I was traveling too much – I would have to go and present a program to various people across the state, having to do with planning and what not. At that time, if I can let a little secret out of the bag, we had what they call a PPP – Population Planning... We were preparing for nuclear war, and I did a lot of planning for that. We would investigate certain buildings and say, "This is where you're going when the bomb comes." If the population was such-and-such, we had to have so many buildings for that population. We had contracts for construction equipment to come and put sand, rocks and dirt around the buildings so that was all in place. .. I did a lot of that work. There were three of us in the department.

408 Dahlstein: What's your major field of interest in this Ph.D. program?

Rivera: Leadership and also the program evaluation and analysis, which is very important. Every program has to be evaluated. ... I plan to – In fact, I already started; my daughter called me last night and she wants to start moving some of my stuff down to Charleston. She wants me to start taking my books down to Charleston. I'm going to spend the summer with her, writing something on my dissertation. Even though I haven't done my quals. [End of tape]

Side B

003 Dahlstein: So did you mention that it was in '92 that you started the Ph.D. program?

Rivera: '86 – my first Ed.D. program, in Occupational Education.

009 Dahlstein: And when did you switch over to [Educational] Leadership?

Rivera: Just before my wife died. I had intended just to keep my mind occupied while she was very sick. [...]

032 Dahlstein: Currently, you are no longer using GI Bill benefits for your studies?

Rivera: No, I have the Legislative Scholarship that they give to people over 65 – that's what I'm using now.

038 Serow: Jules, you also have a Research Assistantship.

Rivera: Yes, I do. That was very gracious of Dr. Serow. He gave me an assistantship

Serow: No, it wasn't me. The university awards-- the College awards it...

Rivera: It's been very helpful. But I have problems – I haven't been very well, I've been sickly since I've been up here. And to do an assistantship you have to have energy. You have to do a lot of things. And I didn't feel like I was earning it, really. I didn't feel like I was doing as much as I should have been doing.

052 Serow: You did a lot more work, you did a lot more good in your assistantship than is common...

Rivera: Well, I appreciate you saying that.

056 Serow: Well, it's true. The GI Bill studies [that you conducted, for example]

Rivera: I didn't feel like I was doing entirely... I would never have gotten away with that in the Marine Corps, you know... I mean they would not have stood for that! A lot of times I'd be away for a week, two weeks – I wasn't feeling well. And I'm still not feeling well. But I'm going to the end. I'm going to make it through this thing.

064 Dahlstein: Could you describe the research project with Dr. Serow, for the record, and the papers that came out of it?

Rivera: Dr. Serow, I could tell, had been planning this thing for a long time. He was waiting for the right type of assistantship, the right type of help for this thing. He kept mentioning it in class, and I could tell he was fishing for something. So I said, "Well, what the heck, I'll try it." So I tried it. I gave it my best shot, I did. I tried to come up with all the information he wanted. Very little of this did I come up with myself. He told me what he wanted -- I just had to decide where I was going to get it. But he knew what he wanted; he knew his project. He had been planning this for a long time; it was obvious.

084 Dahlstein: You set up a number of interviews for some qualitative analysis...?

Rivera: Yes. He wanted some people, World War II vets to begin with, that had to do with the experiences after the Second World War. Initially, I think he wanted something like a hundred. So I fished around to see where I could find some of these people. And I ended up going back to the Archives, since I had a lot of experience in the Archives when I worked for the state government. And Si Harrington helped me out there. There's another fellow down there that's very played down; his name I think is Phillips, a retired Army Colonel. And he helped me a lot too. He works for Si Harrington, who is a retired Lieutenant Colonel. They were very good to me. They gave me the files... I spent a good amount of time there. ... I went through those files with a fine-toothed comb...

116 Dahlstein: And today you got to sit on the other side of the microphone...

Rivera: I still have some stuff... I have a little recorder that belonged to my wife. Her voice is still on one of the tapes. I used that for the first six interviews, I think it was.

122 Dahlstein: [Bob,] Do you have any questions that I have forgotten to cover today, do you think?

125 Serow: Jules, what do you think of the GI Bill as a federal policy, as an educational policy?

Rivera: Well, there's a lot of good in the GI Bill, and it certainly was intended to do a lot of good things. It is very much appreciated by the people that it was given to. They don't say that; they don't say it too much and they don't say it too loud

but they really appreciate it – I know I appreciated it, and I know a lot of people that have taken it with me, who appreciate it.

But there's a – If I can say this, and I think you want the truth. There's an undercurrent, a very strong, visible cross-current. It's the standoff between the military and the new society, you know, the public universities. Every time there's something, they're out swinging the banners and showing the things. The people who don't want this and don't want that, don't want to support the president. That undercurrent is there for the GI Bill, it really is. They don't say much, they don't say it, but I know a lot of people who are very offended every time these students take to the street. They're very offended. They don't say anything; they keep it to themselves. And every time someone comes around asking questions, they wonder where it's coming from, you know? They don't know what to believe or what to expect or who they represent or what the mind-set is. It's a very touchy area, a very sensitive area. I know Dr. Serow was just telling me he went to California and did a presentation on the GI Bill and there were two people out there that snubbed you, weren't there...?

155 Serow: There were two people there from the military who were very skeptical about why an academic would be interested in the GI Bill. I think you're right: There's a real tension between the military and the social sciences in particular...

159 Dahlstein: There's some mutual suspicion there?

Serow: A lot of it. And in fact, that's something that Jules has been wrestling with. I know it hasn't been easy for him, dealing with a project that is military-related to some extent. I think he's had some discomfort with that. So I'm very grateful that you agreed to be co-author of one of the papers, because I know that took a lot of thinking on your part.

166 Rivera: Thank you. Well, I wanted to support you. He's very modest – he's been very good to me. I mean, he admitted me to this program twice, which he doesn't do normally.

170 Serow: That wasn't just me! It was an office full of people...

Rivera: The sad thing is, this sensitivity, this undercurrent – it's there; it will be there as long as people don't want to support, don't want to be a part of... Dr. Serow has gone beyond that; he has come up with a subject that I didn't even know existed. Something called exceptionalism, which really goes to the heart of the matter in many areas. And we're working on that.

180 Dahlstein: thank you [...]

192 End of recording.