

NOTICE

Materials in our digital Oral History collections are the products of research projects by several individuals. USF Libraries assume no responsibility for the views expressed by interviewers or interviewees. Some interviews include material that may be viewed as offensive or objectionable. Parents of minors are encouraged to supervise use of USF Libraries Oral Histories and Digital Collections. Additional oral histories may be available in Special Collections for use in the reading room. See individual collection descriptions for more information.

This oral history is provided for research and education within the bounds of U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). Copyright over Oral Histories hosted by the USF Libraries rests with the interviewee unless transferred to the interviewer in the course of the project. Interviewee views and information may also be protected by privacy and publicity laws. All patrons making use of it and other library content are individually accountable for their responsible and legal use of copyrighted material.

Ybor City Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: Y10-00007
Interviewee: Jose Vega Diaz (JD)
Interviewer: Gary Mormino (GM)
Interview date: August 24, 1980
Interview location: Tampa, Florida
Transcribed by: Unknown
Transcription date: Unknown
Audit Edit by: Mary Beth Isaacson, MLS
Audit Edit date: December 16, 2009 to December 22, 2009
Final Edit by: Kimberly Nordon
Final Edit date: December 22, 2009

Gary Mormino: Hi, my name is Gary Mormino, and today, it's my pleasure to be talking to Mr. Jose Vega Diaz. Mr. Diaz, how, could you tell me something about your family? What about your father? Where was he born?

Jose Vega Diaz: He was born in Spain in Asturias Province.

GM: In Asturias, uh-huh.

JD: Asturias, Spain. Yeah.

GM: Well, what did his family do over there?

JD: Well, he come—I think he was about fourteen years old when he come to Cuba.

GM: Yeah.

JD: He come in a vessel.

GM: A vessel? Uh-huh.

JD: It take over three months to come from Spain to Cuba.

GM: Is that right?

JD: Yeah, when he fourteen years old.

GM: Uh-huh.

JD: (coughs) I can tell you something when he went up to Tampa (inaudible).

GM: What did his father do in the old country?

JD: Oh, there's a cigar factory for the—(inaudible), that's what he was making. (inaudible).

GM: Ship clerk?

JD: Yes, ship [shipping] clerk.

GM: In Spain?

JD: No, no, Havana, Cuba. No, no, St. Margaret. My wife and my mother in St. Margaret in Cuba. Oh, yes.

GM: Mm-hm..

JD: When he come—he fourteen years old when he come to Cuba. Yeah, he learned that job.

GM: He learned to make cigars in Cuba?

JD: No, he don't make cigars in Cuba. Only ship [shipping] clerk for the ship from cigar factory. Yeah.

GM: Mm-hm.

JD: Ship [shipping] clerk is the one that fix the box for delivery.

GM: Shipping, right.

JD: Yeah.

GM: Right. What about in Spain? What did he do in Spain?

JD: Oh, in Spain, nothing. He's a young fellow.

GM: Young fellow. What about his father?

JD: His father? I think he was a farmer.

GM: Farmer, uh huh.

JD: Yeah, I think it's in the little town where they born. It's about three or four miles from Gijón, in the country.

GM: Right.

JD: That's where it is.

GM: What's that area like in Spain? Could you describe it?

JD: Oh, I can't describe Spain. No, too long. Hey, I've been to Spain like three or four times, yeah.

GM: Right.

JD: (inaudible) The people is a good people. Yeah.

GM: Right.

JD: You want to know about Papa?

GM: Right. How did your father get to Tampa?

JD: In boat. (laughs)

GM: In boat? (laughs)

JD: Yeah. My father used to work in there, okay, (inaudible) and we are seven brothers at that time. I had three sisters before me. I'm the third—the fourth. Yeah, seven children when my father come to Tampa. Eighteen ninety-two, he come to Tampa, with seven sons. We come to Tampa to live and work here, Sixteenth Street and Eleventh Avenue. We come to Tampa at that time to live in Tampa. And then, in that part, he had a job, (inaudible) in the cigar factory. He get a job at fourteen dollars a week, and he had seven—one of my oldest sisters started working at that time.

GM: Go ahead. Continue. (adjusts recorder)

JD: I like that better.

GM: Yeah, I think it will be a little less noisy then.

JD: Yeah, you can—that rubber there, on this side here—the rubber—

GM: Yeah. How did he learn to make cigars? When did your father learn to make cigars?

JD: No, he don't make cigars, he work in the—

GM: Oh, he was a clerk here too, at the Martínez Ybor factory.

JD: Yeah, he was the same thing here, in the packer department. The ship [shipping] clerk. Yeah.

GM: Why did he come to Tampa?

JD: Because he had no job in Havana. He and my mother had seven children, he have no job, he have to look for [one]. He had an uncle here, my mother's fifth brother. He call her and tell her he finds a lot of jobs here, at that time. (inaudible)

GM: Right.

JD: And soon he come here, started working there at Martínez Ybor Cigar Factory. Yeah.

GM: Was he involved in any of the political activities in Cuba with the war and everything?

JD: No, no. He was president of the trader union, of the union.

GM: He was president of a trade union.

JD: That's why they (inaudible).

GM: Mmm.

JD: Trade union, yeah.

GM: What was the name of the union?

JD: Oh, the same. They call it (inaudible) at that time in Cuba, (inaudible). I don't know how they call it in English. (inaudible) They put the ribbon around the box and everything to make the cigar.

GM: Packers, right.

JD: Yeah (inaudible).

GM: Yeah. Right. How did he describe Tampa in 1892? What was Tampa like when he came?

JD: Oh, well, there's nothing here when we come to live here, on this corner here, on Fifteenth Street, and then we moved to Twelfth Avenue. Oh, not Twelfth Avenue. It's close. Twelfth Avenue from here to Fifteenth Street, it's close. That belonged to Martínez Ybor; he had a big building there (inaudible). And that's (inaudible). See, at Seventeenth Street, he had a big building, Martínez Ybor, called—I don't know, Hacienda or something like it. We live there. If we have to go to down in Ybor City, we have to walk, but it's sand. All this is sand.

GM: Right. Yeah.

JD: Yeah. And at night, they have to use light in the kerosene lamp to walk around the streets. Yeah, had to go with a kerosene lamp.

GM: Yeah. Now, what year were you born?

JD: I was born in Havana.

GM: What year?

JD: I was born in Havana.

GM: Yeah, what, what year? *¿Que año?*

JD: Eh?

GM: What year were you born, in time? Eighteen eighty-five, was it?

JD: No, no, 1884.

GM: Eighteen eighty-four you were born.

JD: Eighteen eighty-four, on December 25.

GM: Eighteen eighty-four.

JD: Eighteen eighty-four, yeah.

GM: Right, right. And you came to Tampa what year?

JD: About seven years old, not quite eight.

GM: Seven years old.

JD: Yeah, we come October 9, 1892. October 9, 1892, on the steamboat *Olivette*.

GM: Right, *Olivette*, yeah.

JD: We reach Port Tampa about three o'clock.

GM: Is that right?

JD: Yeah. And they would come on the railroad to Sixteenth Street and—yeah, Fifteenth Street and Sixth Avenue. The boat did, the steamer.

GM: Right. What did you think of Tampa? How did Tampa compare to Havana?

JD: Oh, it cannot. No.

GM: Why?

JD: Well, because we have in Havana at that time, we had a boat; we had a seaport, (inaudible) in Havana. Now the seaport go to Port Tampa by nine months of the year. When they told me we go to Tampa, when we come to Tampa, we come to Ybor City. We don't come to Tampa. Tampa is three miles from here, I think, downtown. Yeah, I don't want to come to Tampa. I cry night before; they had to call a little girl to come to tell me that Tampa is a good place, that it's beautiful. (laughs) And I don't know. When I got to Tampa, right?

GM: Well—

JD: Then we come to live in a little town. We moved many place from here. No screen, no lamps, nothing. No electric light, no nothing, nothing. And sometime in the Ybor City, some place—two or three blocks [had] a small light, electric light, (inaudible) or something like it.

GM: Did you have any relatives here?

JD: Roes?

GM: Relatives.

JD: No, no, only my sister and my mother's brother. That's all.

GM: How did your mother like Tampa, Ybor City?

JD: Oh, yeah, she liked it. My family liked Tampa, but—well, they like Ybor City. At that time they like it, because our lives were [at] the Centro Español. Centro Español, that's the only club they had at that time.

GM: (coughs) What was the Centro Español like at that time?

JD: That time very good, because all the families, all the Spanish families, joined there every Sunday. We had a—

GM: What would you do every Sunday? What would you do on Sunday?

JD: On Sunday, we had a (inaudible).

GM: (inaudible)?

JD: Yeah, uh-huh.

GM: What's a (inaudible)?

JD: A Spanish (inaudible). *Teatro*.

GM: Like a dance, you mean?

JD: Oh, (inaudible).

GM: (inaudible) Oh.

JD: Oh, that's the (inaudible). (laughs)

GM: That's okay; I can look it up in the dictionary.

JD: Yes, Spanish. Oh, no, you can't look in [a dictionary]. There's a sign there. (speaks Spanish)

GM: Oh, well, don't worry.

JD: Same that make the pizza bread, (inaudible)?

GM: Oh, okay, okay, I get it.

JD: (inaudible)

GM: Oh, okay.

JD: (laughs)

GM: What, what...

JD: *Teatro*.

GM: Yeah, what would you do on Sundays at the club?

JD: Well, we go there during the day. I go to school full-time. I go to learn cigar maker when I (inaudible) years old.

GM: Uh-huh. You quit school?

JD: Huh?

GM: Did you quit school?

JD: No, they send me to learn cigar maker, because my father made them. And that's the way I went to school here. It's a school they call St. Joseph Catholic School. And that's the way—that's why I come to Ybor City. Ybor City is the same as if you stay in Havana: only Spanish. Don't talk English; nobody speak English at the time. Oh, many, when they (inaudible), Spanish, Spanish, Spanish. That's why they go. I (inaudible) English. (laughs)

GM: Right. Where did you learn how to make cigars?

JD: Huh?

GM: Where did you learn to make cigars?

JD: I went to one cigar factory they called Don Salas Mora, around Eighteenth Street and Thirteenth Avenue. A lumber building; they burned out (inaudible).

GM: This was 1896 then, right? You learned to make cigars?

JD: No, 1886.

GM: Eighteen ninety-six. You learned to make cigars?

JD: Oh, yes, by that time. Yeah.

GM: How long did it take you?

JD: Huh?

GM: How long did it take you to learn to make cigars?

JD: Two years. At this time they were (inaudible).

GM: Do you want me to ask Maria?

JD: Yeah.

GM: Oh, okay.

Pause in recording

GM: Theater, that's the word we were looking for. Theater.

JD: We have that every Sunday. (laughs)

GM: Oh, okay. Well, I'm interested—

JD: That's what I tell you. (laughs)

GM: Okay, I'm interested in your cigar experience. Tell me how you learned to make cigars.

JD: Well, how you learn? They put me in place beside one of the cigar makers, and then he tell me, "Make a stripe," the thing that go inside the cigar. I make that, I give to him. I make another, I give it to him. And after I have made many of them very good, then they send me to learn how to make the cigar (inaudible).

GM: How much did you make your first job?

JD: Oh—

GM: (laughs)

JD: I've been working (inaudible) many years. I worked to make cigars until 1926. Since that time, I don't make them.

GM: Yeah. But how much did they pay you your first job? Do you remember? What did you make?

JD: Oh, yeah.

GM: Money, money.

JD: Uh, fourteen dollars for a thousand. Fourteen dollars for a thousand. I cannot make thousand, because I make 125, 150 a day or something, at first. After that, I make many kinds of cigars. Yeah. I used to make about 1,200 a week.

GM: Um hum.

JD: Only 1,200 in a week.

GM: What was your—did you join a union?

JD: The union? Yeah, I joined the union.

GM: What was the name of the first union you joined?

JD: La Resistencia.

GM: La Resistencia, uh-huh.

JD: La Resistencia, yeah.

GM: What was that like? Tell me. Describe that.

JD: All the cigar makers—cigar makers, packers, selectors, strippers—everyone in the cigar factory joined the union, La Resistencia.¹ Yeah.

GM: Why did you join the union?

JD: Why we—I joined the union.

GM: Why, yeah.

JD: Why, for better conditions in the cigar, on the job and the work—better conditions—because the cigar manufacturers want to take more and more of the money.

GM: Right.

JD: They pay very bad.

GM: Uh-huh.

JD: You know, they sometimes used to pay—I tell you, the small cigars, fourteen dollars a thousand. They pay fourteen dollars a thousand. Then they change you from the main hall, and they give you the same job, the same size [cigars] in the downstairs, another hall, and pay you two dollars less, because they make you scratch—pick (inaudible) to put inside the cigars. They put that stuff, they put it—it's better for them; they get two dollars less, and save the material for the cigars, the tobacco.

GM: Uh-huh.

JD: Now, you gotta surprise me because I talk too much. (laughs) Sure.

GM: You must have known Mr. [Vicente Martínez] Ybor.

JD: Huh?

GM: Did you ever meet Mr. Ybor?

JD: Oh, yes.

GM: What was he like?

¹The union's official name was La Sociedad de Torcedores de Tampa, but members called it La Resistencia. It was not the first union formed in Ybor City, but was the first effective one.

JD: He used to live in these apartments.

GM: Uh-huh.

JD: (inaudible) He lived there. He used to live on this block here. Yeah.

GM: What kind of an owner was he?

JD: He was a good fellow. Yeah, a good man.

GM: If he was a good man, why did you need a union?

JD: Oh, well, there were many cigar factories. Not only Martinez Ybor, there's many cigar factories here. Yeah.

GM: Do you ever remember Ybor having a picnic for the workers, and going out on his carriage?

JD: No.

GM: No?

JD: No, I don't remember that, no. No, Ybor, I don't remember that.

GM: Right. Who were the leaders in La Resistencia?

JD: In La Resistencia? The leader? Well, the main secretary—it's not a president; they have only a secretary. They call Jose Gonzalez Padilla; that's the name of the fellow. They had to quit from Tampa, because if they catch him, they kill him. They kill him. (laughs)

GM: So, he left.

JD: The strike—when we had a strike, the main strike, and the only other strike that La Resistencia had, we lost that strike. Four months, that strike. He had to quit from here, because if they catch him, they kill him. When La Resistencia had the strike, one night, the Citizens' Committee, they come from (inaudible). The Citizens' Committee go around in the night, and take those men who belong to the committee, thirteen men, they take them and, take them away into a vessel go to Honduras, far from here.

In Honduras, they put them in the shore, and they tell, "Go that way. Walk that way." They went away, and they find an Indian. From there, the Indian ask, they ask, the way, "Is this the way to go to *ciudad* Trujillo, the main city?" [The Indian said] "No, that's the way to go to the—" (inaudible) and that way, they got to *ciudad* Trujillo and they got away from Tampa.² They never come back to Tampa, because—

²The citizens' committee, comprised of local business leaders, abducted the thirteen union leaders on August 5, 1901 and put them on a steamship, depositing them on the

GM: Who was kidnapped? Who did they send to Honduras?

JD: The Citizens' Committee.

GM: What were their names, the men who they took? Do you remember?

JD: Oh. No, I don't remember. I know one, but I don't—they call (inaudible). See, (inaudible) used to be mayor of the (inaudible). He was one of the Committee.

GM: Uh-huh.

JD: (inaudible) They say this president of the Citizens' Committee—*Comité de Ciudadanos*, they call it. *Comité de Ciudadanos*, they take part in many strikes. When La Campa³ had a strike—another strike that we had in here; they call it Seven Months Strike—they catch two fellows that don't belong to the cigar factory, the cigar makers, anything. One had a (inaudible) and another is an insurance collector. They get (inaudible) one night, and they hang them.⁴ And they put a sign: "We need seven more."

GM: What did the sign say?

JD: "We're gonna get seven more."

GM: Seven more.

JD: (laughs)

GM: How about yourself? Did you ever receive discrimination?

JD: Well, not exactly—well, sometimes I had to hide myself, because—I had to take care because I used to be president of the Joint Advisory Board, the committee for (inaudible), because sometimes they have some trouble. I had to go hide myself, because I'd be afraid of that. One friend of mine, that used to be the president of Joint Advisory Board, he had to quit from Tampa, too. One night, we had to take him, by railroad—by automobile—to

Honduran coast. Two of the men were the president and treasurer of La Resistencia. One of the men, Félix Méndez, did return to Tampa in 1902, and was immediately arrested.

3JD may be referring to José de la Campa, who was president of the unions' joint advisory board. He was arrested during the 1910 strike, the Seven Months Strike.

4This was in response to the September 14, 1910 shooting of James F. Easterling, an Anglo bookkeeper employed at Bustillo Brothers & Diaz Factory. The men in question were Castenzio Ficarrotta and Angelo Albano, who had both been accused of various other crimes including murder and arson. Police arrested them on suspicion of complicity in the shooting, but before they could be tried a mob abducted and lynched them.

Lakeland, so he could go on his way from Tampa, because if they catch him, they kill him, too.

GM: He was president of what, now?

JD: Joint Advisory Board.

GM: Joint Board?

JD: Joint Advisory Board. They call him when the committee, the international union, all the cigar makers, everybody—

GM: IWW [Industrial Workers of the World], was that the same thing?

JD: No.

GM: IWW, no.

JD: They called it Joint Advisory Board. That's what it was called. That's what they call it in English, Joint Advisory Board. We call it in *español Comité Consultiva*. Joint Advisory Board. All the (inaudible) belonged to the factory had a member that belonged to that committee.

GM: Okay. What was the first strike you were involved in? Do you remember? What year?

JD: When I was a cigar maker? Well, the first strike was when I was in La Resistencia. But before I am a cigar maker, I had another strike. They call *cherutos*.

GM: *Cherutos*?

JD: They would charge you on the main floor, and they give you another—the same job on the other floor, and two dollars less. (inaudible) take that away, and they wouldn't. They wouldn't. They take that away. Yeah.

GM: Do you remember the weight strike, the weight strike of 1899, where they said you had to make so many cigars per pound of tobacco? Were you involved in that one?

JD: Oh, yeah. Yeah, that's the second one. That's the second strike, *La Huelga de Pesa*. Yeah. We win that strike.

GM: Tell me about that strike.

JD: You know, that strike come because of the— (inaudible) at that time, Martínez Ybor retired. He's dead by that time. (inaudible) Before that, the wages would be so bad, he had to put a kitchen to give a dinner to the cigar makers. After that, when he start to work

again, they put a scale in the factory, so that they say you have to, because the tobacco cost too hard, cost too much in Cuba. When the Spanish ship in Havana put a load, they don't like tobacco [to come] to Tampa. You see? And then, the cigar—the tobacco cost too much. And he said that to the cigar makers, so that he cut to the scale.

So the safe—the cigar makers start to make a riot. For the cigar maker to allow one cigar maker that don't work there, ask for a job in there, went to work in there, and then make the others cigar makers go on a strike. They started a strike, we come and we go, we come and we go, and nobody got to work there. So then, (inaudible) says, "Why don't the manager of the Martínez Ybor cigar factory call the other manufacturer, and tell him that if they join him, together they make—the cigar makers make the scale in the factory." The other cigar manufacturer go, join with him, and close the cigar factory. They say, "If you want to go inside again, you have to wait for the scale." But nobody go.

So, they allow the cigar—all the cigar factory manufacturers open the factory (inaudible) and they go to the Committee. Committee then say, "All right, what do you want?" [The workers said] "We don't want nothing. We don't want you to put the scale in. That's what we want. And we're going to make a union." That's when they started La Resistencia. They made the union at that time. (inaudible) lost, but two months later, after that, he opened the cigar factory. He called the Committee, and he put the scale up.

GM: So, you won that one?

JD: Yeah. (laughs)

GM: Did you win any others?

JD: No, that the only one. (laughs)

GM: (laughs) That's the only one you won.

JD: We won the *cheruto* before that. That's the *cheruto* there.

GM: Tell me about that, the *cheruto*.

JD: I tell you before.

GM: Oh, that was about the work done.

JD: They start you out on one floor; they give you the changeover to a different floor, at two dollars less.

GM: Huh. Well, you were in Tampa during the Spanish-American War.

JD: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I come in 1892, and the Spanish-American War was in 1898.

GM: What do you remember about the war?

JD: Well, I remember the soldiers here. Yeah, there were many soldiers here; that's the war.

GM: Do you remember any incidents?

JD: Oh, yeah, a few incidents. I saw one. I saw one. And I hear another one. The funny one is this one: By that time, there's a streetcar here, a small streetcar. It only had the motor and four wheels: a small streetcar. They used to have a picnic in Palmetto. A big bunch of soldiers is down—called Palmetto Beach, down there by Thirty-Second Street. Palmetto Beach, they have a picnic there. And many soldiers, three cars full of soldiers go by here. And the streetcar going that way, at one time it jumped out of the track; it's about by (inaudible). That was the only thing. No break in the street, only the railroad, the track.

All the soldiers get out of the car, (GM laughs) and put (inaudible) on the track. All right? They know how to pave by that time, yes. Many of the collectors, the private collectors, come around and say, "No, no, we don't pay now. We don't pay, we wait. We wait until we have to put—" [Someone else said] "No, you have to pay." [The collectors said] "No, no!" The streetcar had trouble. The one in the back put (inaudible) out and the streetcar stop. Then, everybody go out on the track, (inaudible), they pull around. Take out the track again, okay, it go. That's one incident.

Another incident is on Seventh Avenue. Yeah. You know, when the soldiers come to Tampa, they (inaudible). They tell the policeman, "Don't be sweet. Don't be sweet with the soldiers. They're rough with them, so they don't scare none." And that time; they used to have the policemen, (inaudible) man, all men. Soldiers run. And they catch one soldier, drunk on Fourteenth Street and Seventh Avenue, and when [they] try to take to the corner there at (inaudible), where the box was, to call to the—they call them Black Mariahs now; what did they call that then? The police car, to take them away. You know.

GM: Paddy-wagon now.

JD: Uh-huh, paddy-wagon. Yeah, when they call it, they try to take the man from Fourteenth Street, another soldier come to take that. The policemen get a jack, hit him in the head and throw him down, and they keep going. The other soldier yelled, "Run! These men, they shoot us!" They get away, and let them take him in the paddy-wagon. Yeah.

GM: Hmm.

JD: That one—see, that's one I saw. The other one, I hear about that.

GM: Uh-huh. That's really something. Now, you were—being a Spaniard, what did you think? Whose side were you on during the Spanish-American War?

JD: Well, the side of the Spanish.

GM: Uh-huh.

JD: Yeah. Now, after that, I know, I roam. (laughs) Because my father is Spanish.

GM: That must have been rather uncomfortable.

JD: My father and some relations believed that (laughs) the Spanish gonna win. Now, no chances. No chance.

GM: Yeah. Were you criticized for this at the time? Did you suffer any (inaudible)?

JD: I was a young fellow at a time. Yeah, at that time in 1892—

GM: Did they close down the Centro Español? The government?

JD: Yeah, they closed the Centro Español.

GM: Why?

JD: Because they said that we had—the Centro Español had (inaudible).

GM: The truth?

JD: No.

GM: No.

JD: Why (inaudible)? No chance.

GM: How about the Cubans here? What'd they think of this?

JD: (inaudible) Yeah.

GM: Did you get along with the Cubans at that time?

JD: Yeah. Some were raised with me, and they were Cubans, too. Yeah, I like Cubans. And my mother [was] Cuban, too.

GM: Right.

JD: Many Cubans—I don't mind the Cubans, but the Italians, yeah.

GM: When did the Italians come to town?

JD: It was before I [came].

GM: Before you came?

JD: When I come to Tampa, yeah, many Italians were in town. Yeah.

GM: They were? Where did they live?

JD: Around that section there, from Seventeenth Street down to Twenty-Second and over from Tenth Avenue, that section there.

GM: How would you describe the Italian community? What were they like?

JD: They like—I had many friends, their families. All my life, I have Italian friends. All my life.

GM: How were they different from the Spaniards and Cubans? How would you clarify them?

JD: Cuban Negroes, American Negroes, Italian, all together in the cigar factory. No discrimination. Everybody worked together, yeah. Yeah, you worked here with one Cuban, another Spaniard here, another Italian there, all together.

GM: Right. Right.

JD: They talk about one different seat, yeah. (laughs) They don't fill the same seat.

GM: Right. During the 1901 strike—

JD: Nineteen aught-one, yeah, that's La Resistencia. Nineteen aught-one.

GM: Okay. I've read somewhere that the Italians were strike-breakers. Is that right?

JD: Italians? No, you can't say that. It may be some Italians were—you can't say only Italians, because see, breakers is a Cuban, a Spaniard, Italian, Negro. Everyone is a strike-breaker. You cannot say that one section of the city is the one to break it. No.

GM: Tell me about the 1901 strike.

JD: That's La Resistencia. That's the one I told you. Yeah, La Resistencia (inaudible), because of the—you know, in the scale strike, the cigar makers win the strike and join, make the union, make La Resistencia. And then the manufacturers tried to make a division, make another—another La Resistencia called La Lega, and then an international union—La Resistencia and the international union, it's all right together, but after that, make some (inaudible).

La Resistencia have—in one factory they have (inaudible). But now, everybody said—the union, they said La Resistencia is the only one to work there. They make a closed shop for La Resistencia only. So the international union went to one factory there—Arguellas [Lopez & Brothers] Factory on Twenty-First and Fifteenth Avenue. Yeah. And then from the ground outside they shoot into the factory, and after that, La Resistencia tell the manufacturer they're gonna strike. Closed shop. That's the strategy La Resistencia tried. We asked them for closed shop, only La Resistencia. We lost. (laughs) Many, many strike-breakers at that time, yeah. You know how it is.

La Resistencia had eighteen thousand dollars—twenty-seven thousand dollars—in the bank, and the Citizens' Committee closed the bank. They don't let the money come out. So, they joined from Key West, from Havana, from New York, you had committees sending money to help us. And then they put a kitchen someplace in the city, made a cantina so the people go there, go into the cantina to eat. And the Citizens' Committee come and throw the (inaudible), and after that we had to give the goods—rice, beans, everything they got—to them. Everything.

GM: What did you do during the strike? What was your role?

JD: I got around. (laughs)

GM: Oh, yeah?

JD: Yeah.

GM: Can you be a little more specific? I mean, what kind of things would you do?

JD: Well, that one strike, I live in Ybor City. But when La Resistencia strike, we live in downtown, over there by—I am but seventeen years old at that time. Yeah. Around and around, we had (inaudible) around the corner, and we went there (inaudible). (inaudible) go to the same Labor Temple; there is a Labor Temple (inaudible). I come every day, walk downtown to the Labor Temple in Ybor City, the Labor Temple on Seventh Avenue; you know where Kress's store [is] at, in Ybor City? Labor Temple is there.

GM: Where Kress's is? Uh-huh.

JD: Kress's, yeah. That's the Labor Temple.

GM: What would you do at the Labor Temple? What kind of activities would go on?

JD: Oh, (inaudible) talk about each other. Yeah.

GM: Right. Would you call yourself a socialist, at that time?

JD: Well, at that time? Yeah. A socialist? Yeah, everyone would be socialist because of the—the laborer get better conditions if the socialists coming. So it's supposed to be that.

GM: Well, what did socialism mean to you?

JD: Some people, they're not socialists. It's anarchists.

GM: What's that?

JD: Anarchy. That's a—you know, no kind of rule, no kind of nothing. Some kind of people (inaudible); they're all gone away.

GM: Do you remember the names of any anarchists in Tampa?

JD: Oh, well, I can't—no, I remember the (inaudible). (laughs)

GM: Sure, why not?

JD: Yeah. (laughs)

GM: How about—

JD: I know the name of the one they kill—the one in Spain; the one that killed [U.S. President William] McKinley.⁵ The one that that came after [Práxedes Mateo] Sagasta in Spain, [Antonio] Cánovas del Castillo. Do you know Cánovas del Castillo? He's the first that governed Spain to say "We keep the war against the Cubans till the last man and the last *peseta*." Well, but he don't count. And then one *anarquista* called [Michele] Angiolillo, he killed Cánovas del Castillo.⁶

GM: Right. You remember Lorenzo Panepinto when he came to town?⁷

JD: I remember when he come to Tampa. I think I saw him.

GM: Panepinto?

JD: Panepinto, yeah.

⁵Leon Czolgosz (1873-1901), who shot McKinley on September 6, 1901; this led to the president's death a week later.

⁶Sagasta (1825-1903) and Cánovas del Castillo (1828-1897) alternated as Prime Minister of Spain, both serving multiple terms between 1870 and 1902. Cánovas del Castillo was assassinated by Angiolillo (1871-1897) on August 8, 1897, after which Angiolillo was executed.

⁷Panepinto (1865-1911) was a teacher, union leader, and socialist from Santo Stefano, Sicily, whose political and philosophical views influenced many of Tampa's Italian immigrants.

GM: How about [Errico] Malatesta?

JD: Malatesta, yeah. I saw him. He was a good man.

GM: What'd he have to say?

JD: He was a very good man, yes.

GM: Do you remember anything about him, or what he said?

JD: What he said? Yeah. I went to one meeting; he had a meeting on Tenth Avenue, Tenth Avenue and Fourteenth Street. He had a meeting there. He talked very good. He's a very good man.

GM: Did he talk in Spanish or Italian?

JD: Oh, Italian, Italian and Spanish. It's funny. He talk in Spanish, yeah; he's no good in Spanish, but we understand what he say. Yes, a good man. I saw many good men. I know —

GM: How about [Pedro] Esteve?⁸

JD: Huh?

GM: Esteve, does that ring a bell?

JD: Esteve, yeah. We used to have a club on Tenth Avenue and Sixteenth Street. Esteve is the president of the club.

GM: Which club is that?

JD: Pedro Esteve. He's a good—

GM: What club was he president of?

JD: A club they call Antorcha. *Antorcha* means “the light.” Antorcha, “the light.” We called it Antorcha. We had a club there. It's not a big thing. They talk, they read; that's what we [did].

GM: Were you an officer of the club?

JD: Of the—?

⁸Esteve (1866-1925) was a prominent Spanish anarchist who edited several radical newspapers and other publications.

GM: Officer.

JD: No, that's only Esteve. We all joined it together. We didn't have no meetings, nothing. We just—almost every night, we go there, talk, read the papers, talk about them. No board; we don't keep. (both laugh). Esteve is a good fellow. (inaudible) long time. He had a paper there. I think he had a paper called—I forget what he called it. *El Despertar*, or something like that. “Wake up.”

GM: What about the 1910 strike? Nineteen ten?

JD: Nineteen ten? Well, that's called [Jose de] la Campa Strike.

GM: La Campa.

JD: La Campa Strike. Nineteen ten is the one because we had a Joint Advisory Board committee, and they don't use the Advisory Board committee. He say, “Trade with cigar factory (inaudible).” They make a scale for the cigars; keep the (inaudible) scale to the cigars. Some kind of people, radicals, they don't want to stay with the Joint Advisory Board and make the Joint Advisory Board collapse. So, la Campa come with another committee, make another committee, and started strike in the factory. They thought they'd make it a bigger strike, but ask a closed shop (inaudible). That's when they called it a closed shop. (inaudible).

GM: Who won that strike?

JD: Cigar factory.

GM: The factories?

JD: Yeah. (inaudible) The weight strike, that's the one we won. This one we lost, too, 'cause we lost every—

GM: What did you do?

JD: (inaudible) cigar factory closed shop. We had a closed shop. But I don't work in cigar factory since 1926. I quit the factory, I (inaudible) to be a furniture collector (inaudible).

GM: On that 1910 strike, what did you during the strike? How'd you eat?

JD: How we eat? Well, we get money from the union. We get money from the union that time. Yeah. We paid five dollars a week. I am single by that time. (inaudible) strike.

GM: How long did that strike last in 1910?

JD: Seven months.

GM: Seven months, right.

JD: Seven months. Yeah.

GM: How about the 1920 strike?

JD: That get ten months. (laughs)

GM: Ten months. Who won that?

JD: The cigar factory.

GM: Tell me about that strike.

JD: Well, they did the same thing. We closed shop, because we received orders from the (inaudible). [George] Perkins is president of Cigar Makers [International Union]. [Samuel] Gompers is president of the American Federation of Labor. President [Woodrow] Wilson called Gompers to join one committee with [Thomas J.] Morgan, another man—(inaudible) it's another one, big manufacturer—the people that had the money. They want to join and (inaudible) together (inaudible) in the country (inaudible) strike, nothing. And when they go in, in the hall and talk, make Morgan tell Mr. Gompers, “Mr. Gompers—” and Mr. Gompers said, “No, I am not Mr. Gompers. I am the president of the American Federation of Labor.” Mr. Morgan say, “I cannot talk to you if you're going to talk to me in that way. I quit.”

And they write to us—at that time, I belonged to the union. I belong to the union at that time. And that time they write to the Joint Advisory Board to tell us, “You have to make an organization there, because the manufacturers of the United States want to reduce the money, the labor, from all the trade.” So they pick the situation of (inaudible), because Mr. Wilson, president of the United States, had to be (inaudible) because of the situation with Gompers. At that time President Wilson was almost (inaudible).

That way they strike and try to organize it; the committee here try to organize the cigar makers. If you get a strike at one factory, the first week they charge you at 10 percent of the cigar maker. If you keep a strike, so that when they charge and they charge and they charge, at last they charge everybody. So they (inaudible) the strike that way.

Side 1 ends; side 2 begins

GM: This is excellent.

JD: No, no.

GM: No, no. You speak the language very well. You do.

JD: (inaudible)

GM: (laughs) On this 1920 strike, were there any radicals involved? You know, socialists, anarchists?

JD: No, no.

GM: No?

JD: No. (inaudible) they told us that we are disloyal, but they don't—(inaudible).

GM: What's that, now?

JD: (inaudible). (inaudible) laborer. That is not the union that make it. They told us yeah, they say that we are disloyal.

GM: Bolsheviks?

JD: No, we (inaudible) *anarquistas, socialistas, radicales*. That's *radicales*. (inaudible) It's a group that say we are disloyal (inaudible) break a strike, a strike breaker. We lose the strike, and it take ten months.

GM: Right. Did you stay in Tampa?

JD: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

GM: Did you ever go back to Key West or Cuba?

JD: No, I stay in Tampa at the time. Yeah.

GM: Now, during the strikes sometimes, would your friends leave town?

JD: What?

GM: During the strikes of 1901 or 1910 or 1920, what would the Cubans do in town?

JD: Oh, many go to Havana, to Key West, to New York, to Jacksonville. Yeah, many go to other [places]. Yeah, many people go to get out of Tampa. Family—some men don't come back to Tampa, (inaudible) don't come back to Tampa.

GM: Why would they leave?

JD: (inaudible) Many go to New York, Havana, and never come back, [or] to Key West.

GM: Do you remember a strike with the International Workers of the World, the IWW?

JD: That's the one I tell you, the IWW. That's what everybody called (inaudible) del Mundo.

GM: The Workers of the World, right.

JD: Yeah, that's what I said. They were better than the Cigar Makers Union. They break up the Ten Months' Strike. But then they quit; they are finished. No more.

(Phone rings)

GM: How about the 1931 strike?

JD: I don't be there. I quit the cigar factory in 1926.

GM: Okay. Why'd you quit?

JD: I don't remember that.

GM: Yeah, this [strike] was over the *lector*, the readers.

JD: Oh, yeah, the *lectores*. Yeah.

GM: Tell me about the *lectores*.

JD: The reader is a good thing that we had in the factory, because the manufacturers don't want a reader, because—they don't want it. No. Yeah, we had a reader. We select the reader, and we select the paper, too, that we got to read. Yeah, the book; we pick the book, and we had the paper, the news: American paper, the Spanish paper, and we had some labor paper, too. The manufacturers don't want that.

GM: Why not? Why didn't the manufacturers want them?

JD: Because—I could tell you in Spanish. I can't tell you (inaudible).

GM: Tell me in Spanish, then try to tell me in English. Tell me in Spanish first.

JD: You know what Victor Hugo say? Victor Hugo say, in every town, in every place, they have a schoolteacher. They had a schoolteacher. In every town—no, he said that it's a light. It's a light. A schoolteacher is a light, the lamp. And they had every time, had someone that blow away the light, the preachers. That's why they don't want any. (laughs) That's what Victor Hugo say. In every town, they had one light, the schoolteacher. And the preachers, they put out the light.

GM: Very interesting.

JD: Keep the people there. (laughs) Victor Hugo.

GM: Who were some of the *lectores* you remember?

JD: Oh, many *lectores*. Here lives one.

GM: Who? Is there one still here that lives here?

JD: Yeah, one lives here.

GM: What's his name?

JD: [Wilfredo] Rodriguez. (laughs) I know him. He used to live—he live up there.

GM: Does he speak English?

JD: I think he speaks English.

GM: I'll ask Maria later.

JD: (inaudible) remember his name. It's Rodriguez—yes, it's Rodriguez. His two brothers and his father used to be cigar readers, too. They call them *Mexicanos*.

GM: What would they read? What kind of things? What kind of books?

JD: A Spanish book called a—we pick a Spanish book, a *novela*. Some good books, and then a novella.

GM: How much would you pay the reader a week?

JD: Well, first, we give a quarter each week. After that, we paid seventy dollars, fifty dollar, seventy dollars a week, and we collected money and we paid one man, the president of the *lectores*. He's the one that collected money. We give him the money, paid him. He's the one that bring (inaudible) at one time. That, you know, that is where I learned to watch the clock. And when they went to learn [how to be a] cigar maker, when the man teach me cigars, it's the president of the readers. And he tells me, "When, the clock goes to that time, the hands go this way, you ring the bell." And that's the way I learned how to watch the clock. Before that, the school doesn't teach that, so I was about twenty years old when I learned to watch the clock.

GM: Right. What did the church do in Ybor City?

JD: The church? Used to be (inaudible). You see, there used to be one on that corner. (inaudible)

GM: Would you go to church?

JD: When I went to school, yeah. I went to school there. I went to church. And after that, I had another, the other religion there at Sixteenth Street and Fifth, I go to the church there because as a kid I wanted to see the girls. (inaudible)

GM: Was this a religious community, would you say? Ybor City?

JD: Yeah.

GM: It was?

JD: Many people go to school, to church, and that church, too.

GM: How about the men? Would the men?

JD: Not so many men. Almost [all were] women and boys and girls.

GM: Hmm. I'm trying to think of some other things. Would you do it over? Would you be a cigar worker over again, if you had a chance?

JD: Oh, no, no, no.

GM: Why?

JD: You know, every time I dream about cigar factory, its bad dreams.

GM: Bad dreams?

JD: Yeah, bad dreams.

GM: Why? What are you dreaming?

JD: (laughs) Bad dreams because you know, we start—when I go to work making cigars, we start at six o'clock in the morning, till six o'clock in the evening. Twelve hours in the cigar factory. Well, after that, we started later than that, but when we finished late—when I dream about cigar factory, I dream it's late, late. I cannot finish, I cannot finish. Everything breaks; the wrapper is the one that (inaudible), break the wrapper. I had too many scratches, Every time I dream about the cigar factory; it's a bad dream. I don't like cigar factories. At first, I liked them, but then after that, I don't like the cigar factory. And last time I dreamed about the cigar factory, [I had a] good morning, and wake very good, but I don't like it.

GM: Right. What do you think of Ybor City today?

JD: The city today? Let me see. (inaudible) Better than before. Better than before in one time, in one thing, because they're going to be—most (inaudible) gonna be better. At that time, many families live here. We all joined the club, and then (inaudible) almost died

because the people lived too far, everything too far. The whole county's the same way, everything too far, shopping center too far from the city. At that time, they had many. We had no (inaudible), we had no doctor in Ybor City, no doctor.

GM: What would you do for a good time in Ybor City?

JD: I?

GM: Uh-huh.

JD: I play bingo. That's the only thing.

GM: I mean when you were a young man, what would you do, what kind of things?

JD: Oh.

GM: On a Saturday night, what would you do on a Saturday night?

JD: Dance, dance. Theater—that's what you call it, theater?

GM: Yeah. Theater.

JD: I went to the theater, see a moving picture. I see many moving pictures in that time. Now, not one [theater] in Ybor City. Now we have television. Everything changed. Yeah. I am the same way. When I joined, I had my own [TV]. This one belonged to me, because I paid for it. (laughs) Everything's different. I'm gonna be—I am ninety five

GM: You'll be ninety-five?

JD: I am ninety-five.

GM: Are you the oldest person here, in the complex?

JD: (laughs) Yeah. I am ninety-five. Last Christmas Day, I had my birthday. Ninety-five. I was born in 1884.

GM: Wow.

JD: Christmas Day 1884.

GM: Well, listen, I'd like to thank you very much. You've been very enjoyable. Maybe I can come back again, and we can talk again, okay?

JD: Better if you learn the Spanish.

GM: *Sí*.

JD: (inaudible) You know, I don't learn English, but as I tell you, because when I come to Ybor City, Ybor City is Havana. Same as Cuba. I went to the school, learn here Spanish, English; book, I learn to read a book. All is Spanish, Spanish. I go to a club, it's Spanish. Every place where you go is Spanish. You go to the dry goods store, or you go to the grocery store, it's Spanish. They don't talk English, nobody talks English; only a few, the ones who used to live in New York, or some other place. My uncle—when I came to Tampa, he's forty years old in the United States. He's born in Havana, too. So, everybody talk Spanish, so I don't pay attention. A young Italian fellow, come to (inaudible), he learn English right away. (laughs)

GM: Right.

JD: You are Italian, too?

GM: *Si.*

JD: Italian (inaudible).

GM: *Parlo Italiano, poco, poco.*

JD: Uh-huh. You took Italian, too? Well, many Italians—my grandson, I had a grandson that took Spanish and English. (laughs) I had to forget my English with him. (laughs)

GM: Listen, I'd like to thank you very much. Thank you.

end of interview