



# Richard Quintero: WAACA Oral History

January 18, 2021

Location: Virtual

Interviewer: Dr. Fiona Vernal

Transcriber: Sulema DePeyster

This interview is part of a series conducted with former members of the Windsor Afro-American Civic Association. The content of this transcript has been edited for clarity purposes.



**WINDSOR**  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** This is Dr. Fiona Vernal from the University of Connecticut. It is January 18th, 2021, and I am conducting an oral history with Mr. Ricardo Quintero. Mr. Quintero can you do the consent as well and then we will follow up with paperwork. So you just say, "I, Ricardo Quintero consent to do this oral history with Dr. Fiona Vernal."

**Richard Quintero:** I do consent and when you send me the paperwork, I'll sign it.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** All right, thank you so much. So can you start by telling me a little bit about your family background as far back as it goes?

**Richard Quintero:** Oh sure. Yeah, I just went through this. My aunt passed away in New York a little over a year ago, and I learned more about my family than I ever knew. My grandfather came from Barbados. My father came from Puerto Rico. [laughing] What a mix. However, I had to go back in my lineage to prove who I was to the court. And it was horrible.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** In what context did you have to prove?

**Richard Quintero:** Well, I wanted to sell my aunt's house. It's in the Bronx and the court wouldn't allow me to do it, and I couldn't get all the information necessary for the court as far as where did her Social Security go. I went to the Social Security Administration, and they kicked me out and they said, "Your power of attorney has no credence here." So the judges signed somebody. Anyway, my family history is just that. I'm half Bajan and half Puerto Rican and, of course, Black. And then last year, my daughter had me spit into this thing and it would tell you what your lineage is and I found out. I wondered why I like Earl Grey tea and scones. I love those damn things, and what I found out was that I'm almost 20% English. [laughing] 30% white and 50 something percent Black. And I'm like, "Oh my goodness." But I have always had a feeling that as we live in this country of democracy, that we cannot stand by and let it pass us by. I was born and raised in New York on 106th Street at Flower-Fifth Avenue Hospital, and I lived in Harlem until I met my wife. I went in the army, and I went to Vietnam and fought and did what I had to do. And then I came home a half-crazy guy.

**Richard Quintero:** Thank God I met my wife because she leveled me out. I was a mean man when I came back here. People spit at me and at the airport in LaGuardia and I didn't understand why. As you know, in our society as a Black person, man or woman, you have to always be on your toes. And then what did I do? I went to work for the federal government. [laughing] I worked in DC for 42 years. I had an office in DC, and I had an office here in Windsor. I had a very wide area to work within, and that was all of New England down to [New] Jersey and then Puerto Rico, Saint Thomas, and Saint Croix. So I had an interesting career and I enjoyed it. I never finished college. I've never felt like my wife does. She has a thing for learning. I don't. I mean, I do learn and don't get me wrong. Every year, I go back to some college and take courses and I've done that forever. However, the structured thing is not for me. It's just not my thing. But getting back to what I was really trying to get to is the fact that I believe that anybody, any Black person in America today that does not embrace their community and take charge of it, [00:05:00] is crazy. The young lady down in Atlanta, Stacey Abrams. If I was president, she'd have any job she wanted because she has done some magnificent things down there. For me in New York, I was the executive director of the Onyx Corporation, something that we put together.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Can we pause a little bit and go back so that we can structure the family history a little bit more chronologically, and then then your life story chronologically? So which part of your family history do you want to delve into? Do you want to tell me a little bit about the Puerto Rican background?

**Richard Quintero:** No, I'd be more inclined to tell you about the Wilshire family from Barbados. That's where I was raised 90% of my child life. I loved my grandfather. He was a classy old man.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** What was his name?

**Richard Quintero:** John Wilshire.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Right. So John Wilshire, your grandfather from Barbados.

**Richard Quintero:** Yes, and my mother was Mildred Wilshire. My Aunt Elaine, Evelyn, and who else? I missed somebody.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** And your grandmother's name?

**Richard Quintero:** I don't know. She was dead. My grandfather had a second wife, Estelle, and she was a nice lady but my mother and her sisters, Evelyn and Elaine, they didn't particularly like her too much. Probably because they loved my grandfather and thought he was betraying their mother. And I got that.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** And so tell me a little bit about your grandfather and what you remember about him.

**Richard Quintero:** Oh, [imitating John Wilshire] "*Richard, come here boy.*" I loved him. He treated me with such respect, and he was a respectful guy and when he talked, everybody listened. And that, I loved about him. You know it's funny. I said I wasn't going to talk too much about the Puerto Rican side. I never learned to speak Spanish. I took French in school, and I wanted to be an engineer, and that's what I did. I built my mother's first radio and television. However, my Puerto Rican grandmother, I think her name was Rosa Quintero, she would take a train from Brooklyn all the way to Manhattan to where we lived on 133 Lenox Avenue just to see me. She'd come up out of that subway and take me, and she did not speak English worth a damn, but I understood her. The love that she had for me was phenomenal. I feel very pleased and proud to have had people around me that loved me when I was a kid. Today, my mother would have been put in jail because I was a free-range kid. I was in Central Park. I mean, I played paddleball and handball until I was 40-something when I came here, and I couldn't find any place to play. But then I hurt my hip, so it's over.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Your grandmother, when she came to get you, was there somewhere special she would take you?

**Richard Quintero:** Yeah. They knew that I liked pie, and back when I was growing up, that was a big thing. You could go to an emporium of some sort and get these kinds of things. My uncle also did the same thing. We'd have a big dinner and he'd say, [imitating his uncle] "*Richard, let's get out of here man.*" We would go to the movies and then we would go to this place. I'd never

had Dutch apple pie before in my life and ice cream and boy I loved that. But last year, my doctor said that I was on the verge of having diabetes. I think it was almost a 7 or whatever. I stopped eating all that stuff and went back to greens and the same stuff my mother did. I went back to the doctor a month and a half ago and she says, "Oh my God, your A1C is only five! What medicine are you taking?" I said, "Healthy food, man. Come on. I don't eat junk food." Now, I've tried to eat pie and ice cream and I didn't like it. It's really weird.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** So your grandfather, what did you understand about his life? Around what time period did he come to New York?

**Richard Quintero:** Well, the Wilshire clan all came here from Barbados. They all lived on 139th Street [00:10:00] and Fordham Road in the same building and they all worked in the garment district, including my mother. That was the thing. My grandfather worked until he was almost in his 80s. The owner of the building loved him. He went to work in his shirt, tie, and suit every day to run an elevator. [laughing] But as I said, I loved him. He was a classy man. I hated the family things because I was the only young person. My aunts didn't have any kids. My cousin was about 15-20 years older than me and he was a dirtbag. He was a smooth guy. Oh my God, he was smooth. He got a big job with the city. He lied about his credentials and eventually got fired. Hey, I was a young guy. We were struggling and as a young man, I was a meat cutter. A man taught me how to cut meat and I was in the Meat Cutters Union by the time I was 17 in my last year of high school, making more money than my father. He wasn't with us, but I was making more money than a lot of people and life became much better for my mother because I gave her half my salary every week and she could do whatever she wanted. Anyway, go ahead. I'm sorry.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** So your grandfather's story is that he migrates to the US. The whole family sort of settles in the same building and works in the same area.

**Richard Quintero:** The garment industry, yeah.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Did they ever disperse elsewhere in New York, or did they all [stay]?

**Richard Quintero:** No, they all stayed up there near each other until they all one by one died. Now my mother's cousin had sons that were close to me, and I got them jobs working for the Postal Service and other things. But they had tremendous educations. I mean they had master's degrees and all that stuff. But they couldn't get traction in life. Although Donald went back to Barbados and became very successful, and he died. His brother died. His mother died. They all passed away and it's just what it is, and my mother passed away.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** When you say they all passed away, you mean when they were very young?

**Richard Quintero:** Yeah, my mother's cousins' children were much younger than me. I'll be 75 in two weeks, and they were at least 15-20 years younger than me, and they died in their 40s and 50s which is very sad. My grandfather lived till he was 90. He had dementia, I think. Well, I'm not going to go there. But my father lived until he was 90 and my father was an old guy. My mother liked old men. I looked at my birth certificate the other day and they said my father was 45 years old when I was born. My mother was in her 20s. He liked young mamas, and my father was an evil guy. We never hit it off and that's why when I got married and Shirley and I had my

daughter, I made sure she knew me. And plus, I cook most of the meals and my wife was going to school and all that stuff. I love my kid, and I just would do anything for her. That's what I don't understand about families, when people don't revere their children. I don't get that. But anyway.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** So tell me a little bit about your mother.

**Richard Quintero:** My mother died when I turned 40. That's 30 years ago, I guess. 30 some odd years. I didn't realize how much I loved her until she passed, and it broke my heart. My wife says I changed, and I did. I became a very serious guy. I got my finances together. I started saving money for us. I did everything right, but I still to this day miss my mom. See I'm getting a little weird now anyway. But my mother was not an educated woman, but she understood one thing: nutrition. I got to tell you; I had fresh vegetables on a plate every night. Maybe one piece of meat, but she talked about that. My daughter is the same way. [00:15:00] I hate going to her house to eat because the sister doesn't use salt. The sister doesn't use too much of nothing. [laughing] It's just food but I'll eat it, and I'll say it's great because she made it for me.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Was your mom born in New York or was she born in Barbados and moved here?

**Richard Quintero:** Good question. I've got to think about that a second. I don't remember. My wife helped me put all this stuff together. I remember my grandfather and my aunt. My mother was born in Panama. My grandfather was on his way here. He worked on the Panama Canal, and my mother was born in Panama. And then she came here. In fact, I went to the same schools she did, to Wadleigh Junior High School, and I was fortunate to go there because my junior high school years, all the teachers were young Black teachers who had just graduated from college. They came with new programs, which I was a participant in, fortunately for me. When you get to the 9th grade in New York, you have to take a test for high schools. Well, I took the test for Aviation High School, Samuel Gompers Technical High School, and something else, and I got into both schools. I was the only Black student, which was some scary stuff. Some little Black kid coming from Harlem, and I get to this school and I'm the only Black guy. It was a real shock for me because I had never been around in that environment in my life. I had always been in schools where it was loaded with Black and Hispanic folks. It was a learning experience for me. My wife asked me, "So why didn't you just change [schools]?" I said, "No, I had my goals." I know what I wanted to do, and I did it.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** How did the teachers treat you?

**Richard Quintero:** A little differently. It's just what it is. Mostly male teachers and most of the white kids that went to that school were more or less rich. I was poor. For me to build a radio or television, I had to go down to Canal Street in the Asian part of New York and buy loose parts out of big bins. Resistors, capacitors, tuners, and whatever I needed. I couldn't go to RadioShack. I didn't have enough money and I had to work after school to do this. So for me, school started at 7:30 in the morning because our curriculum was academic and technical. Because it was, you had a very long school day. Then I worked after school. When I came home, I studied, and I

pretend like I'm a dumb guy but not really. Not hardly. I never was, but I thank God for the way my life has turned out for me because I learned a lot about me and about life.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Did you make a few friends at Gompers School?

**Richard Quintero:** Only one I remember is Stanley Bornstein and he was rich. His father was a millionaire, and we were friends. But most of them were snobby little white kids and had no time for no Black students, and I didn't give a damn because I was so busy taking the train to get to work and get home and I didn't really have that much time. Now my friends, that's another story. I'm not going to talk about that.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Your home friends? You mean your friends back home?

**Richard Quintero:** Yeah, yeah. I had a very close-knit bunch. In fact, back in my day, there was not really any televisions. In my building, we had 10 apartments. My English teacher was on the second floor. I definitely did my homework and there were two sisters two floors down and we used to watch TV together, *[singing] when you wish upon a star*. *[laughing]* Remember that? Anyway, we used to watch that and then on Friday nights, we watched the horror movies. *Frankenstein* and all that stuff. They were close friends of mine and then I had two buddies across the yard. We had a clothesline that came from my window to theirs, and we used to communicate that way until our mothers let us hang out and do what we did. George and Bunny.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Their names were George and Bunny?

**Richard Quintero:** Yeah, Bunny's real name I can't remember, but his mom was like my wife. She was a very, very forceful woman and very smart. She made a lot of money because she was on some machine that nobody knew anything about, and she knew how to do it. Just like my wife. When I met her, she worked at NYU. She was on a machine called the MTSC, whatever that is, some automated something, and she was kicking the pig too. And I had just gotten my job at the Postal Service.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Did your grandfather share any experience about what it was like to be West Indian in New York?

**Richard Quintero:** No, he was a proud man. He didn't talk about the downside. He was very uplifting and that's probably why I liked him so much and I'm very much like him. I believe that the glass is half full always because it's just what it is. I was telling my wife the other day, I used to speak in front of some of the older gentlemen here in town at the Caring Connection, bringing updates on what's happening in the Black community as well as issues that were important to them. I think it's important for us, as Black men, to impart life experience with our young people because life has changed. I was talking to my nephew and his lady, I believe, got a tremendous education and has a tremendous job, and he's at home taking care of the kids. And that's a real switcheroo. I'm not saying it's bad. It's not. It's cool. I did half of that myself. I did the cooking; I changed those diapers. I did all that stuff and it's healthy.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** So when I was asking about your grandfather, I didn't necessarily mean a negative experience. I just meant like was he part of a club or a church group?

**Richard Quintero:** No, no, no. See the generation before me, in my mind, was more traditional. You come home, the wife fixes a nice meal. And when I met my wife, her parents were the same way. I knew her mom almost 50 years and her mom had six brothers and sisters. There's six of them all together and her mother was there and that's what she did. After her father went off to be an electrician, he came home at night, had dinner, and everybody went to bed or watched TV. And it's the simple life. My generation is different. I was involved in stuff from the moment I met Shirley. I told her. I think the first thing I did was with National Neighbors Fair Housing in New York, and it was through a club that we had put together called the Onyx Corporation and we provided \$5000 scholarships to Black students going to college.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Can you talk about the origins of the Onyx?

**Richard Quintero:** Oh yeah. I lived on 11325 Seaview Avenue, right off the Belt Parkway, and a gentleman in my building approached me one day and said, "Hey, Rich, you want to be part of this?" And I said, "Yeah." So I did and this one was multi-racial. We had Jewish folks, we had Puerto Rican folks, Black folks. We were a community. It was a wonderful community. We lived in a place called Starrett City.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** How do you spell that one?

**Richard Quintero:** It was Starrett. S-T-A-R-R-E-T-T City. It was a federal housing complex. However, it had everything. It had tennis courts, handball courts, Olympic swimming pools, a sauna. You name it, we have it, and it was not the typical project that you might see in most cities. And it was racially mixed. There was some rule back in the day that allowed them to do that. I think somebody filed some suits against them and they lost after we left. [00:25:00] But it was a healthy environment. Anyway, with the Onyx cooperation, we approached everybody in the community and said, "Hey, this is our community and we want to highlight our children and give them something to do." So we would give these events and we'd fill up a place. We'd have a table. It had been blessed by a rabbi with food for the Jewish folks, and we had a table for the Black folks, and one for the Hispanics. It was cool and we worked with Reverend [Calvin O.] Butts at Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem to find Black students to give these this money to. It was fun, but then the life in New York was tearing us down. Just going to work, to go 6 miles, it would take almost 2 hours. And we had daycare, and it was just awful. And then I got an opportunity. I got a really big promotion, and I came here to Connecticut. The first thing out of my mouth was, "I'm not going to live in a town and not understand what's going on." And to this day, I'm on the Democratic Town Committee. I am the president of Retired Federal Workers for the State of Connecticut and something else I'm doing. But I'm just saying it keeps me alive and it keeps my mind sharp as hell and I feel good about this. But we haven't talked about the about WAACA.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** I'm trying to make sure I have enough background information. When we're putting programs together, sometimes it makes it a little bit easier for us to contextualize people's experiences and participation. So, for example, I could certainly say that your experiences of community involvement in in New York stretches far back and that your Windsor experience isn't the first time that you've been deeply involved. But yes, we can definitely

transition. I just want to clarify or if you could just tell me a little bit about how you ended up in that Federal Housing.

**Richard Quintero:** Oh well, as a Black person and I have to say it this way because we had applied. They said, "Oh, just send your application in." Well, we got no response. We called. We went up there. And then I had somebody pretend to be a lawyer and called, and all of a sudden, we got an interview. Then they tell me that I didn't make enough money to come there. But fortunately for me, I had worked two jobs. I had worked for the City of New York as a pest control guy. I had to go back to NYU and take some courses. Unfortunately, the teacher was my boss. [laughing] So you know that I passed that course. I learned about bugs and rats and everything else. But when I threw down a second W-2 and my income went over the number, the lady says, "Okay, we have an apartment for you." That's how we got in, but many Black folks didn't get in.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Where were you moving from?

**Richard Quintero:** Oh, I only lived like two blocks from the place, so it wasn't a big deal. But the big deal was that on each floor, they had racially set what nationality went into each apartment. We were in 6A and if you looked at the way it was set up, it was all Black folks in 6A, 3A, 4A, 5A. And across the hall from me were Chinese folks. Down the hallway was somebody else and that's the way they set it up. So in my mind now, I'd say that was discriminatory. And here we are in a Black community and you're picking and choosing. And then I lost it when I found out that Russians were coming here. I'll say that. That's what it is. Russians will come into this country, and they were here 10 minutes. They had an apartment, and they had a job. [00:30:00] And I'm sitting there looking around. I'm seeing black men. They don't have a job and I said, "What the hell is going on here?" When I came back from Vietnam, I took the test for everything. Transit Authority, the Postal Service, the State Troopers, and unfortunately for me, I got called for all these jobs in the same week. [laughing] So I tried three of them and two of them didn't work for me. My mother never said too much to me about anything, but she said, "Richard, you're going to accept the job in the federal government. I don't give a damn what you think. Take that job." So I did.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** So, which one was that?

**Richard Quintero:** At the Postal Service. Honestly, I hated it. It was the worst job in the world. [laughing] I thought it was stupid and it just didn't work for me. Thank God I met my wife, though, because when I met her, I changed a little bit and became more focused. I'll give you an example. When my daughter was born, I had a big afro out to here, an earring over here, and a boom box over here. It's just a typical stuff, and Shirley said, "Richard, you've got to start working days." So I went and got a haircut, took that thing out of my ear, put on a suit, and I went to work and talked to the head chiefs. And then if I didn't change, they wouldn't put me on days.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Please tell me you have a picture with the earring and the afro.



**Richard Quintero:** No, because the only pictures that we found is when I met her, and I was clean cut. My hair was black, and I had a little [mustache] here. I still got it but now it's grey. No, I didn't have a camera. We didn't take many pictures. I said we were poor. I can't tell you. My father left us and I started working when I was 13. At 14, I was working in the butcher shop and cleaning it out. And then Jimmy taught me how to cut meat. He took me down to the market to buy the meat and showed me how to pick out the best beef and all that stuff.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** What was Jimmy's ethnicity?

**Richard Quintero:** He was a Black man. All family. I was fortunate. Even though my father left, my life was full of Black men that were real. I had one man. I was an only child. However, my mother's best friend had two sons. Well, three sons actually, because we were like the four Musketeers, and I was with them all the time. In fact, I didn't change schools until the school system caught up to the fact that I shouldn't have been going to the school with them. I should have been going to the school around the corner from my block where I lived. And they did catch up because I was staying at their house. They had two sets of bunk beds. It was the four of us. We were crazy and they caught up with me and sent me to the school near my house. Unfortunately, it was a school with, I'd say, 90% Puerto Rican students. So I was told that I was smart. My mother taught me how to read and write at home. So when I went to school, it was like, "Okay, this is some stupid stuff, man." [laughing]

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** What grade did they catch up with you when you started going?

**Richard Quintero:** I think I was in the second grade. Well, no, it must have been first [grade] because my first grade teacher was Ms. Fotiades [SP]. I'll never forget that.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Who?

**Richard Quintero:** I can't spell that.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** No, just say it again.

**Richard Quintero:** Fotiades. She was instrumental with me. She really reached me and it's funny. I think it was like 10 or 15 years later at the [New York] World's Fair, I'm walking down there and I see her. I screamed out her name and she looked, and she says, "Oh my God, Richard!" [laughing] And she was such a nice lady. Yeah, I had good teachers, fortunately for me. Of course, I kind of embraced it, too. But life is something. It's a journey, man. Excuse me. I didn't mean to call you man.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** No, it's fine. Yeah, there's some great memories there. Thank you. I mean, there's no way to talk about your life and not excavate a little bit of the [00:35:00] New York stories because Connecticut is a completely different place. So, can you transition?

**Richard Quintero:** Yes, it is. I could write a paper about that, the difference between the two. I am very happy, number one, that I was born and raised in New York because I have a different attitude. I wouldn't have been successful in the government if I had not been raised in New York. The first 12 years of [my daughter's] life were in New York and I insisted that she learned two languages, Spanish and English. She's working at Bay State [College]. In fact, she started at

UConn [University of Connecticut]. I had to go up there and do some things because she and her roommate were the only two people who are were Black. They had them in a little room that looked like a closet and I was not happy. I was paying the freight. We didn't qualify for not a nickel. I had that changed immediately and she went over to [a different house]. I forget what that house is called. It was beautiful because they didn't want to see me again. Oh my God, I was irate, but I was very, very nice about it. But I think it's too big a campus, number one. You need some intimacy with the students. The school I wanted her to go to, because we did the school pilgrimage thing, was Rutgers [University] and George Washington University. And then there was another Black school down there in Virginia that I really liked. I met the professors and they talked about [knowing] the students and staying attuned to them. Now that, for me, is something that I think is important for all students. But my daughter ended up staying. She wanted to go to UConn and she did.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** All right. So can you transition me now? So you get married, you and your wife stay in New York for the first 12 years of your daughter's life. Can you tell me how you transitioned to Connecticut? You said it involved a promotion, right?

**Richard Quintero:** Yeah, my wife was working at Revlon at the time, and I was working in the Postal Service. She had helped me to write some resumes. We went to the library, and the government has a set way to make resumes and I kind of modified it. [...] I applied for a position, and I didn't get it. I was beaten out because there was politics, something that I didn't understand at the time. A guy wanted the job, and they gave it to him.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** What was that job?

**Richard Quintero:** Supervisor of Office Services for the City of New York. When I say City of New York, I mean for all of the post offices in New York City. That's all 5 boroughs, and I would be the purchasing agent for all of those people. So I didn't get the position, but two weeks later, the gentleman turned the job down and said it was too big for him. So the director of finance, who became my friend, came to me and put two big books on my table. He said, "Okay Rich, you've got to read all this and you're now the man. You have 12 employees." So I started studying and doing my thing. It started from there and as you know, life goes on. I started helping other Black women, because most of the staff were women, and helping them get promoted to better jobs. And one day, the entire office comes to me and slaps a position on the desk and says, "Richard, what about you?" I said, "Well, they'll never accept me at their regional headquarters. They don't want me there. They know I'm outspoken," because I was very arrogant back in my young years. And so I applied. I said, "Okay, what the hell." So my wife and I practiced. We went to the library and got this book called *100 Most Asked Questions on Interviews* and we did all that. And damn if I wasn't called in for an interview. I was rattling off the doggone answers. I knew the technical stuff, and eventually I got the job.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** And where was that?

**Richard Quintero:** It was at the regional headquarters, which was located on Broadway and 50th Street in Manhattan. But it was the same building that that Playboy Club was in. We were on the 20th floor. Playboy was on the 21st. [00:40:00] My office overlooked the Hudson River.

But let me tell you, here's where I ran into racial mumbo jumbo. No one, let me say it again, no one spoke to me when I walked into that building. The top guy, my boss, the staff. Nobody said a word. I only had one woman that spoke to me. Her name was Ms. Washington, and I was going to be working with her. The position that I got was a professional specialist trainee. That meant that I was going to be taught contracting as well as asset management. And over a three-year period, I would get promotions each year if I did well. Of course I did well, but I got to the level EAS-18 and they wouldn't promote me even though I was getting outstanding evaluations. So I went to the top guy and I said, "Hey excuse me. What's the problem, man?" And he says, "Well, Rick, we don't have anything." You know, they give you the mumbo jumbo and I got upset. So I relaxed for a little bit. And then when I went in to see my boss again, I said, "Excuse me. I will not come in here again and ask you. The next voice you hear will be my lawyer. Have a nice day," and I walked out. I got promoted. Next day, I was a level 20. [laughing] You know?

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** You worked with Ms. Washington the whole time as you were moving up through your promotions?

**Richard Quintero:** Yes, and she was great. She taught me a lot of things. But she knew the job backwards and forwards. If you asked me her first name now, I couldn't tell you. But I had a great run and then I became the aide to the Director of Finance of New York City, and that man took me all over the United States. [laughing] I learned more with him than I could ever imagine. He's the guy that brought computers to the Postal Service, and he just changed the whole nature. He was a Mexican American. He and I were like my father. We bumped heads all the time. I was surprised he hired me to be honest because he says, "Well, Richard, maybe I just won't give you this job." I said, "Have a nice day. Goodbye," and I was leaving. He said, "Get over here!" He slaps this thing on the table says, "That's your first project." It was at a time when the UPS and FedEx were opening up all of these little stores. They have them all over now, and the Postal Service went out and bought all these boxes. Oh my God, they went to I think six different companies and bought millions of boxes.

**Richard Quintero:** Then the boxes started coming in and they didn't know what to do with them, and they handed it all to me and said, "Okay. What are you going to do with this?" So we had 42,000 offices in the United States and I just got a listing of all of the offices in Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey. I found out where the space was, and I had a team going in and setting up using the specifications that I had developed. Look, I had fun. See I would take projects that nobody else would take, and I would just rock and roll with it, you know? And then I got promoted again, but here's the deal. Imagine you and I are working in the same position, and they bring in my wife as our boss. But you've got a masters, I've got two masters, and we're not even considered. So my friend, who is still my friend, we filed a suit against our bosses. There was a legal remedy within the government that you could take and I filed. We both filed and when it came down, I think I was sitting at home on a Saturday. I get this piece of mail in the mail and it says, '**Richard Quintero**, you are the manager.' [laughing]

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** And your friend got the position too?

**Richard Quintero:** Yeah. Monetarily he got it. I got the position to run the place, but he and I had the same salary. He looked at me, he started laughing. He said, "Richard, you got screwed." [laughing] [00:45:00] But I have to say this. Our whole career, he supported everything I put on the table.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** What's his name?

**Richard Quintero:** We had a team here. We were the headquarters people, and I had a policy that we sit down as a team and develop solutions. It's not one person trying to come up with it, and a lot of times, they outvoted me. They said, "No Rich, you can't do this," and I'd say, "You're right. Let's rock and roll." And because I would hand off a project to you, I'd say, "If you need assistance, come back. If you need something, come back. If you don't understand it, come back and we'll do anything for you." However, we were all pretty independent. I had hired almost everybody who was ex-military because I knew they had the discipline to do the things I needed to get done. I didn't want anybody around that I'd have to coddle and tell you everything to do. Who the hell wants to do that? And so we worked very well, the four of us, because we covered a wide area. I mean, we were traveling all the time. In fact, I forbid anybody to go to Maine during the winter. But unfortunately, we had an emergency in Bangor and the manager, the dumb guy, [points to himself] jumps in his van and goes to Bangor and does the job. And I'm driving back, and The Weather Channel said clear skies and no nothing. A squall comes off the ocean. I'm on I-95. The wind blows me across the highway to the side of the road. I hit a snowbank and the car stops. And I said, "Ah, I'm okay." And what did I say that for? The damn car started rolling down in a crevasse.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Oh no.

**Richard Quintero:** I ended up upside down, bloody nose, and scared out of my socks. I crawled up to the top. The car is totaled. I got the seat belt off. I get to the top of the road and there's a helicopter taking my picture for the six o'clock news. My hands were shaking like this, and it was an awful thing. I couldn't drive. They had to get somebody up there to drive me back here to Connecticut. I was messed up. And then, of course, the government requires so many reports and police reports and all the rest of that. They actually required me to take driver training. [laughing] And I did and then I got a brand new explorer and I said, "Yeah, this was worth it." [laughing]

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** So your mother sort of pushed you to settle down into a federal job.

**Richard Quintero:** Yes. Yes, she did.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** The worst job in the world. But then that still elevated you up, up, and up, right?

**Richard Quintero:** It turned into the best job.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** And then you transitioned to Connecticut? Can you talk about the transition to Connecticut? What was the promotion that brought you to Connecticut?

**Richard Quintero:** Oh well, that was when I became the manager of the whole shebang, and I had a great boss. We had a regional headquarters here in Windsor, about 10 minutes from here,

and I found a big space that wasn't being used. I called my boss and I said, "Hey, I want to set up an office here for us. I don't want my crew sitting out with these Northeast area people. We're not them. We're not under their aegis. We need to be a separate department," and he concurred. He came up here, took my wife and I out for dinner, and he said, "Richard, I'm going to find the money for you. You find out what the rent is," and I did. And we did that. And then I had the place renovated. I had my little Omni telephone in my office, and we had adequate space. I put in four cubicles out there and we were separate and apart from the Northeast area, which was cool.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** What was your motivation for keeping it separate?

**Richard Quintero:** My team were headquarters employees. Northeast area here was moving your mail and had nothing to do with me. Even though my team went out [00:50:00] and checked on their maintenance and different things, they didn't tell me what to do. My orders came from Washington, and so I didn't need any affiliation with them, and I thought it was better to be apart. My boss concurred with that and because he was my friend and, again, he was a military person. He was a Lieutenant Colonel, and so was my number two. He was a Lieutenant Colonel. He stayed in the reserve forever. And in fact, before I retired, I went down to DC for almost a year. My wife told me she was going to divorce me. They put me up in a beautiful hotel on Route 1 below DC. Marriott has a beautiful hotel but behind it, they have apartments. That's where I stayed for almost a year. Crystal City is where I stayed.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Wait, what were you doing there for a year?

**Richard Quintero:** I was being the national manager of assets.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Oh, and your wife didn't want you to go? [laughing]

**Richard Quintero:** No, we were going to move down there. It was going to be another big, big promotion, but we couldn't find any place to live. We tried in DC. I took a month off, I think, and we went down a lot of times. Then we ended up in Richmond, [Virginia], and we tried to buy a house. It was an auction or something. We ran into some really bad stuff, and I won't go into all of that.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Right.

**Richard Quintero:** But it was an interesting experience, and then I found out that the people that I report to, they stand out on I-95 in the HOV lane to get a ride into DC every morning. I said, "I'm not about to do that. That's just not in the cards for me." I tried Amtrak. How could I get up from Richmond to DC every morning? And it was 35 bucks. That's crazy. I wasn't making that much money and I don't know. I decided, about, eight months later, I just retired. But I enjoyed what I did. It was fun. In fact, they've tried to call me back. I had a couple of projects that I was working on. They still haven't, even after 8-9 years, taken advantage of it. I showed them where they could save \$30 million, and I got called on the carpet for that. The vice president of the Postal Service [was a woman]. She had fun lambasting me. "You can't do that. That is my area." You know? But I don't want to do that anymore. I'm done.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Can you talk about moving to Windsor?

**Richard Quintero:** Oh sure, yeah. Well fortunately for me, when we came from New York, they gave me top executive moving rights. They gave me \$5000 cash. Just incidentals, and they came in, packed up our stuff, and brought us up here. At the time, I couldn't afford to buy a house. At least I thought I couldn't. But I wish I had taken advantage of them because they would have paid for almost everything. But a few years later, after we were living on Kennedy Road here in Windsor, I was up in the closet in my house looking for something. And all these savings bonds, because I used to buy savings bonds every paycheck, and I did it from the first day I got the job. Well, I pulled those things down and found out I had \$15,000 sitting up in the closet. So we went and bought a house. It's just what it is.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** What were you looking for when you were looking for a house in Windsor?

**Richard Quintero:** Well, I wanted to live in Windsor. I wanted to be in a multicultural environment. There's no question. No Simsbury or Avon for me. Yeah, those are nice communities, but I wasn't interested. Not really. And so we came here and that's what we were looking for. I'll share this with you. My daughter was so accustomed to New York. The first night, she comes into our bedroom. She says, "Mom, dad, I don't hear anything." [laughing] We kid her about that all the time, you know. And she was right. It took me a while to get accustomed to that.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** The quiet?

**Richard Quintero:** The quiet, yeah, because the only thing you could here were crickets. [00:55:00] There may be an animal outside or something, but that would be about it.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** [laughing] You already lived in Windsor, right?

**Richard Quintero:** Yeah, I still do.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** But then when you were buying a house, you had already lived there. So what were you looking for in a house and which part of Windsor?

**Richard Quintero:** At the time, whatever we could afford. Because in the early years we only had one car, and Shirley was looking for jobs and stuff. She was having a hard time and so it was a little bit of a stretch. And my daughter had been an honors student in New York, so she comes here. Oh again, another situation. We go to the school and based on her last name, which is Quintero like mine, the lady says to me, "Well, little Black children don't do well here. We're going to put you in Level 1." I said, "No, you're not, lady. Dream on. This is an honors student. That's just not happening." And I had just met with the Superintendent of schools. [laughing] So I told her. I said, "Ma'am, you're going to have a really tough day if you do this." And she said, "Okay." And then my daughter ended up being in the honors program and all the rest of that. Not that she's the smartest thing on the planet. She's not, but she is a very bright young woman. She was very bright, and I don't mean to make it sound like she's a superhero. She's not. She's smart. She has a wonderful heart.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** But there was no basis for that assessment. It was just an assumption.

**Richard Quintero:** No, it was based on the color of her skin like everything else in our lives. Yours, mine, everybody else's. I didn't experience that much of it in New York. See when I was a kid, the four of us boys went down to a farm in Virginia every summer. And I remember my friend's grandmother said, "You boys can't go over there." And we're boys from New York. We're like, "Wait, what are you talking about, Mama?" What it was is that they had colored bathrooms and white bathrooms. And this was right in Virginia in some little stinky town that we were staying in. I had never experienced that. I didn't experience it in New York until I married Shirley because I intended to stay in New York. We went to Queens to get an apartment, and here's some foreigner telling me soon as she saw us. "Oh no, no, the apartment is not ready." She could barely speak English, and here she's telling me I can't have an apartment. And that's when it kind of hit home for me because I had lived in Harlem. It's a black community and I never had problems like that, you know? Because I traveled all over New York.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Right.

**Richard Quintero:** I would go to Washington Heights just to get some good bread because they had a Babka bakeries up there, you know? And I would go down to Chinatown and have great Chinese food. Or to Little Italy. Nobody would bother you. You could do whatever you wanted to do, and I was accustomed to that. But when we experienced that, I was kind of taken aback by it. It was like, oh man.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** What kind of bakery in Washington Heights did you say?

**Richard Quintero:** It was called Babka bakeries.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** What?

**Richard Quintero:** B-A-B-K-A.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Okay, and then can you tell me a little bit about getting involved in WAACA?

**Richard Quintero:** Okay, I can't remember this lady. I can see her and I can't say her name. She and her husband were the ones that started WAACA. [Willie Graham and Albert Graham] Stanley Cicero and Vivian Cicero were instrumental for me joining WAACA, especially Vivian. She just passed away last year. Maybe this year, I think. Yeah, it was this year earlier. Oh no, it was 2020. Yes, they were instrumental in me getting in and what we did as an organization, if I remember correctly, we gave scholarships to students coming out of Windsor High School. We were involved in the Shad Derby. I remember I would go get the meat patties from down on 44 there. And that bakery, I forget. It's at the end of the street.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** The Scotts Bakery?

**Richard Quintero:** I think so. Yeah, they're still there. [01:00:00] We also did things at the PAL, and it was about community-based activities, how we can make our community a better place. We had programs at the school over there. I forget the name now. I should know it because we talked so much about it. It's the Senior Center now here in Windsor. We did some programs there. We had a couple of programs. In fact, like I was telling you the last time we spoke, I turned on Channel 5 and there was a guy singing and it was me. And I was like, "Oh, damn." And it was

on a Black history thing that we had at the LP Wilson [Community] Center. Those are the kind of things we did, and it was bringing us all together.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** How did you meet the Cicero's?

**Richard Quintero:** That's a good question. I don't know. I don't remember. You know what it was? Someone had invited me to come to one of the meetings, and Vivian was very open. And she came and talked to me because I would be at their house sometimes. Stanley would be smoking his pipe and drinking Scotch, and Vivian was just doing Vivian. She was cool. And Vivian and my wife got along pretty well. In fact, Florence was just recently got off of the Democratic Town Committee because I'm on the Democratic Town Committee as well. The other thing I'm involved in is transportation here in Windsor. I'm on the Board of Directors of the Greater Hartford Transit District for the Town of Windsor. The town manager pays for that. In fact, we just had a meeting with him last week [to talk] about where we're going with downtown Windsor. I don't agree, but I'm that lone voice. They want to have just one lane coming through town and I just think it's a bad idea. Everybody's so focused on these bike lanes. I'm not a proponent of those either. I just think that people's lives are at risk. And as a driver, you don't always see these folks, and it happened to me the other day. A woman is dressed in black. Her bike is black and she's Black, and I couldn't see her. I damn near ran her over. And it made me so damn angry. I was like, "Why would you do that?" So I'm just not into it, but I am into the revitalization of our downtown. You betcha.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Well, in terms of revitalization, can you tell me what Windsor was like coming from New York and having traveled all over the country and all over? What was Windsor like for you when you first moved?

**Richard Quintero:** I'll tell you. The first thing out of my mouth when I got off the highway was, "Oh Shirley, look at this. We're going back in time." [laughing] And I still think that. I grew up in New York and I grew up in a little community with a lot of little stores and it was cool and I think that's what's missing right now. I took a course on community activism at NYU and, in fact, we won the damned competition. It was a lot of fun, but one of the things that one of the instructors said was that strip malls were going to come back. And they are coming back. If you go over to Buckland, the strip mall below the mall is kicking. Every store is full. The parking lot is full all the time and I believe that will revitalize our downtown. Now I don't know what it's called. It's right next to Geisler's. It used to be a movie theater but it's a whole building, and it has a lot of stores and a lot of other things. If that was alive, with adequate parking it would be fantastic. It'd give people a reason to go downtown and not have to travel a million miles. My wife keeps saying to me, "Richard. Where do I go to get some nice pantyhose?" And we know where the wig stores are. Bloomfield, the lower part of our town.

**Richard Quintero:** But stuff like that for women. [01:05:00] And look, I know that it costs a lot of money to run that kind of thing because I started my career with my friend Mr. Jimmy Stutly, and I saw the bills. The electric bill, the water bill, it's never ending. As you can see, all of these restaurants are going out of business. Lord and Taylor, gone. All of them can't survive because they don't have the volume. So you have to give people a reason to want to go downtown in



Windsor. Like the day we had the chili cook off. I was there with Jay, and Jay is a chef and I watched him make food from scratch. It was glorious because I know how to cook too, and Jay sat there and we made this chicken chili that was just phenomenal. The chili cook off that we have here in town, they had a Latin band there the year before last. I'd never seen that many people because I didn't know we had that many people here in town. That's what you have to do. You've got to get people down there and have a reason for them to be down there. And unfortunately, the town is not part of that revitalization. There's an Indian doctor that's up on Kennedy Road that owns the dog hospital. He and his brother, they have quite a bit of money and they bought the building and they've been renovating it very slowly over the last, I don't know, two years.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** What are they putting there?

**Richard Quintero:** Got me, I don't know. I asked the town planning zoning and she told me. She said, "Richard, I don't know. I wish they'd let us help them. Then, we could move this thing on a little faster." But yeah, I don't know. I haven't got a clue. For me, if things were okay, I love going to either Starbucks or Dunkin' [Donuts]. I prefer Starbucks because I like Grande Chai. But I like going in there. I'll sit down with my Kindle and read a book. I've read about 500 books since I retired, and I miss that. You talk about missing something. Sit in a comfortable chair, read a book, and life is good. I do miss that and that's what I'd like to see in town. A place where you could sit down and have either a great coffee, great scones, because I love scones.

**Richard Quintero:** You're not going to find them around, but my wife says, "Oh Richard, you can't eat that." I said, "Shit, you can eat anything you want." Like my mother said, "Eat it and then leave it alone. Enjoy it." But it's things like that. Things that you don't ordinarily find close to home. That's what I'd like to see, but I don't know if it's ever going to happen. I've been here 35 years and, believe me, our town is well run. We have an enormous amount of money in our reserve. They handle the money well. They get a lot of grants from federal and state. I love it. And it's a safe place. That that's the other thing. I have to say that the police chief [Kevin Searles], before a year and a half ago, was my friend. It was funny. I'd be at the airport to go teach a class out in Oklahoma. Who I'd be sitting next to was my friend Kevin and I was like, "What the hell, are you following me?" I said, "Are you going to give me a ticket or something?" But we used to talk about his policing style here in town and he said, "I give my police officers the authority to stop any infraction that they see. Age, color, it doesn't matter. Any infraction they see, they're going to stop you."

**Richard Quintero:** He did that, and our town is safe. In fact on Friday nights, we had a Black gentleman that was a member of WAACA. He used to go to the West Indian club in Hartford. He came back one night a little lit up. The police took him. He was on television. [He said], "You know those boys put me in jail?" [laughing] He said, "Do you know who I am?" The cops said, "Yeah, you're a guy that's impaired. Have a nice day." And that's how tough they are. In fact, I go to the Greater Hartford Transit district meetings in Hartford at the train station. I was coming home one night [01:10:00] and I think it was right before Christmas. We went to a restaurant to have a Christmas party and I had a glass of wine and I'm coming back to Windsor. But do you know they had four police cars out there stopping every car and checking to see if

you were drunk? [laughing] They stopped me and I had all my books in the car with me. And then he looked out at my books. He said, "Okay, have a nice day, sir." And then they let me go. But if they smelled my breath, they would have smelled that wine. [laughing]

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Oh, you didn't get a breathalyzer or anything?

**Richard Quintero:** No, no, no, because I wasn't driving crazy. I only had one glass of wine. Plus I had dinner. It was no big deal. But I'm just saying that's how safe our town is and they found some horrendous stuff here. In fact at one point, there were some drugs, I think, getting into the high school. Well, they put some undercover cops in the high school, just like on television, and those guys rooted it out I think within a month. They'd gotten to the root of it, and they found out where they were coming from. And it's not like it's just our police officers. They're working in conjunction with Bloomfield, Hartford, Windsor Locks. They're all working together, you know? So they share information. Probably more than you wanted to know.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Let's get back to WAACA. So, what was the initial approach?

**Richard Quintero:** I was just invited to a meeting, and I wanted to be part of it.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** What did you hear that made you want to connect further?

**Richard Quintero:** Anything like that would have attracted me in a heartbeat. It still does, you know? As long as I have a breath in my body, I'm going to still be out there doing my thing because you just have to. I know you're a professor. What town do you live in? If you don't mind me asking.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** I'm next door. I live in Manchester.

**Richard Quintero:** Oh, okay. Well, my wife worked there. She put up the website for Manchester. She was secretary to Rob Houston. Yeah, Rob is gone now but the guy that's in charge of systems is still there. She worked for him too. Wow.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** So you were saying?

**Richard Quintero:** I don't know what I was saying. [laughing] I'm old.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** [laughing] No, you said that anything that was about making the community better.

**Richard Quintero:** Yeah, anything that makes the community better, I'd like to be part of it because it makes our lives better as far as I'm concerned. I've been rattling on for a thousand years here.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** No, that's fine. So what did you want to contribute to specifically once you got involved?

**Richard Quintero:** I wanted to see things run better. I tried that when I was President. But I found out how hard it was, and one thing is how do you motivate people. That's what I've dealt with being president of the Retired Federal Workers. Everybody wants to continue to do the

same thing over and over again. And I'm a change agent. I believe nothing stays the same. Nothing. Marriage, your life. You're not guaranteed a good life your whole life. Things are going to get stupid at some point and you need to be ready for that. And that's what I find hard for people to deal with. That's the biggest challenge of anything and it was the biggest challenge when I was president of WAACA. I couldn't do some of the things I wanted to because I couldn't get people to do what I wanted to do.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Tell me what was your vision of what you wanted to do when you were President?

**Richard Quintero:** Just do what we were doing, but doing it better.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** How?

**Richard Quintero:** Yeah, well, that was the thing. What I realized was that I needed people to work with me to do things and it got a little frustrating for me when people [said] "Oh, I'll be there on Tuesday." But then they don't show up and then you can't get it done. And then I found myself jumping out there trying to do it myself and I'd say, "Wait a minute. This is not going to work." You can't do it like that. Like right now, I'm very happy being president of Retired Federal Folks because I've got people doing what I asked them to do and doing it with vigor [and] with zest. And they do it because they want to do it and that [01:15:00] is cool. But that was my frustration then and then the other thing was that it was waning when I became president. You know when people begin to walk away? It happens, and it's just what it was. And then I walked away myself.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** What do you think contributed to the initial vigor, if you want to call it that, and what contributed to it waning?

**Richard Quintero:** The initial vigor is the fact that you see it has potential. That's what I saw. However, in the end, I don't know. You know what happened? People got older. A lot of the former people who were there before me were older than I was, and they started just getting older and saying, "Hey my kids are gone. See you later alligator," and that's how it goes. When you don't have that infusion of young people into any organization, then it wanes. It goes by the wayside. I'm experiencing that now with the other organization because the federal government under your president made it very hard for me to get into federal agencies. And I've had to find some work arounds and I have found one that I hope to take advantage of. But back then, I had no way to incorporate it. You know how white folks have cotillions? We have them too for 12-year-olds and 13-year-olds when they get to that age. They're revered. That's what I wanted to do. Oh, we used to have the breakfast. Oh my God. My wife and I, I think we put on one of them. I don't know where we did that. Boy it was successful. It was cool. People came out for a great breakfast, and there was something else with it. I forget now. I think we gave awards or something. It was a breakfast award or whatever. But it was things like that I wanted to do where you bring people out, tell them who you are, tell them how they can become involved, and then make your organization better. That's what I thought and still think.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** So, did this kind of succession planning come up in the meetings before you transitioned?

**Richard Quintero:** Yeah, it did. [...]

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** You were still talking about succession planning. So I was saying what kind of questions about succession planning came up for WAACA as people realized that they needed to bring in young people?

**Richard Quintero:** I don't know. Probably nothing much, honestly. It's a situation I'm trying to deal with now. I am the president of Federal Retired Folks, but I want to step down. I want to step out. Not that I don't like it. I love it, but I'm the oldest person in the room and I'm the only new ideas that I hear. And I'm like, "What the hell?" I'll give you another example of that. Before I retired, I was going to open an office in Philly. I had to hire 17 people. The job required a college education, and I'm interviewing these young people. I found them inadequate, [01:20:00] unable to answer simple questions, [and] unable to use logic. And for me, that was a big deal. Of the 17 positions, I only hired 3 people from the outside. I ended up going inside the Postal Service, putting out the vacancy announcements and taking people that were already working, and it worked out better for me. Now for WAACA, people lost interest because we weren't doing anything innovative. It's just that simple. You have to do things differently and when you start talking about doing things differently, you get, "We didn't do it that that way," and I find that offensive.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Those two things clash. How is it that you're not doing anything innovative and then when you try to do something innovative, they say we didn't do it that way?

**Richard Quintero:** It's just how it rolls. That's how it is. People do not like change. You're breaking tradition and once you start trying to do that, they get crazy.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** But then they're losing interest because it's not innovative, so what would they want?

**Richard Quintero:** It's not where their head is. And then unfortunately, that's the way America is right now. You just look at all the stupid people that went to DC and broke into our house. And what did they do when they got in there?

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Nothing.

**Richard Quintero:** Nothing. So what the hell man? They think they did something big, and then the opposite of what these folks are saying [is what they] said back in the day. It's like, "Well, we don't want to change, but we got to do something." It's like this. [Quintero pushes his fists together to motion clashing]

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Right.

**Richard Quintero:** And nothing happens.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** So compared to your life in New York and traveling and being a manager and being in leadership positions, do you think that this is a general problem with Black civic life all around?

**Richard Quintero:** It was. I think this election cycle has awakened a lot of people: young, old, rich, poor. I believe that our people are waking up. That's Black, Hispanic, Indian. When I say Indian, I mean Indian folks from India because they're part of it. They're just as Black as we are. Look, I'll give you an example. [laughing] I even worked in Puerto Rico. I do understand a little Spanish so people have to be careful with me because if I understand you, I'm going to have this blank look on my face and won't say nothing. I said that for over 5 years when I went to Puerto Rico to work and one day, I made a mistake. I spoke in Spanish. [laughing] They hated my guts after that.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Why? Because they knew you were understanding them all along?

**Richard Quintero:** They said, "We knew you understood." I said, "I don't understand everything. I can't speak." But I said what I said. I must admit, I loved living down there. I even had my wife think about it. I said it's a slower lifestyle. It's one that I really, really dig and I dig the food. And man oh man, I really could do it. The only regret I have in my life right now is I haven't been to Barbados yet, and I am going down there soon. [laughing] I want a change. I am going down there to see my roots. I want to see the Wilshire family.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** I'm a bit surprised that you haven't made it down there.

**Richard Quintero:** You know, it didn't come up on my chart but I need to do it because that's where my family is from, and before I leave this Earth, I need to get that satisfaction for myself. And my whole family is happy. My daughter said, "Dad," because I took her to Puerto Rico. We had the greatest vacation ever. I got adjoining rooms on the ocean at the Marriott. Man, it was nice. We got there on a Saturday night. The music, they had a live band. Oh Lord, it was just the bomb. My daughter went back twice. She went down to [01:25:00] Luquillo Beach. That's where the locals go. I saw it. I just didn't stop because I worked down there, and I had to stop driving down there. They drive crazy. The light turned red then everybody starts going.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Let's backtrack a little bit. What's the most important information you think that we should document about WAACA? Especially if folks want to resurrect it, or at least learn from what worked well and what didn't work well.

**Richard Quintero:** Okay, I'm going to answer the last of your comments first. If you wanted to resurrect it, you'd have to develop a program that would be relevant to today. One of the things, unfortunately, I think we were a 501C and there are some rules about that. I'm not sure what they are at this point in my life because I'm a 501(c)(5) and I know what that is. But you have to always consider the political component and the community component, which are very vital, I think. How do you incorporate the community? What programs do you have? And you need things that are relevant because think about it. Right now, our town is like in a resurgence. The demographics are changing. We have more and more young families moving in. Those are the families that you probably want to get incorporated because their children are going to the

schools. So there you go, you know, and what can you do to help their children to have a better life in town? One of the things that I learned when I was with WAACA, I would go to the library because I go to the library a lot and you'd see all the kids there. They can't go home because mom and dad are working to pay that mortgage. So what can we do to help that? How do we get these same parents involved in the Board of Education to run for the Board of Education? Right now, we have a Black gentleman who I think is doing a phenomenal job. Our school system last year, 92% of the students went to college or higher education of some kind or military. These are the kind of things that a resurgence of that organization would need, and a youthful look. Not an old guy like me telling people what to do. I mean, I could be a part of it, but have a young president with new ideas [and] new ways of seeing things because my perspective is different. That would be a good beginning as far as I'm concerned.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** And then what's the most important for understanding about the history of WAACA, and what it did contribute?

**Richard Quintero:** That's a good question. I thought it was great for the folks that were here. First, it was a time for us to get together and kind of take a hard look at where we stand in the community. But that's about it. I can't pinpoint something specific that we did that was earth shaking or that really had some great impact. We participated, and Florence was a big part of that too. I can't minimize Florence. She was in there. She's a go-getter, and she would jump up and do stuff other people wouldn't do. And I applaud her for that.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** If you guys are focused on participating in community life and taking stock of the Black community in Windsor and focused on education and political participation, why would it fall apart when the population is growing demographic-wise?

**Richard Quintero:** Oh no, no. It fell apart I think ten years ago. Today I said we are changing as a town. We are incorporating more people because we have more housing here in town now and that's part of the deal. I'm going to be sitting in on a housing [meeting] very shortly and the people that are moving in, I'll give you an example. [01:30:00] Down by the train tracks, those apartments down there, they're beautiful. Young folks are there, and they've taken advantage of transportation. They can jump on the train and be in New Haven in 30 minutes. Life is good. We have new apartments going up on Day Hill Road. I forget how many. I think it's 500 or 700 more young people. We have ING, the insurance company, here in town as well. Here where I live, we've got Walgreens and Dollar Tree and who else? Somebody else is up here. All this land is going. Oh, and Amazon is building a second distribution center right off 20. It is huge. I can't believe it. This is bringing a lot more people to our town. The demographics are changing now but when WAACA was dissolving, it wasn't. It was stagnant. And then, like I said, people got older, and they started walking away and they started moving away, actually.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Okay.

**Richard Quintero:** Listen, Lee Word and his wife [Barbara Word] moved back down to wherever. Another couple, they moved. People just started moving away and without the infusion of other people, you can forget it.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Okay. I'm almost finished. Thank you for your patience.

**Richard Quintero:** Okay because I do have to get out. I'm in the process, I just purchased a condo for my father-in-law. He's 96 years old and I'm waiting for my daughter to come here and help me move this table and chairs over there. I think I can get it in my car. Oh boy.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** So my last question for you is education has always been an important part of what WAACA focused on, and the young parents are coming in. Has the profile [shifted] in terms of time or the kinds of jobs that the young parents are working? The young people who are shifting the demographics, are they the kind of people who have the time to get involved in an organization like this? Whether they don't have the time because they're working two jobs, or whether they don't have the kind of time because the kind of professional job they have doesn't permit that.

**Richard Quintero:** Okay, I don't know the answer to your question, but I will tell you this. I was in Washington at a symposium talking about volunteerism, and one of the things that they focused on was the fact that the lifestyles of young people today are different.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Yes.

**Richard Quintero:** I have great sympathy and empathy for young people because many of them are working two jobs and today with the COVID-19 baloney, they're working two small jobs and not jobs where they're making a great salary. I'll say this: if you're smart today, you can find a job. I see the 'we're hiring' [signs] everywhere up here where I am. I talked my mailman into taking a promotion in the post office before we moved here. That was about 10 years ago, and he came to my door. I said, "Yeah, what's up?" He says, "You talked me into this." He says, "I'm working my behind off and I'm getting less money." He quit being a supervisor. He quit the Postal Service and went to work for Costco. I see him up there now. He says, "Oh, I'm so happy. I'm the supervisor here. I got a health plan. I'm making 15 bucks an hour. Life is good." Jobs are out there. However, my original statement, I stand by. It's hard for young people today and that is the problem. But remember I mentioned at that at our library, all those students were there?

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Right.

**Richard Quintero:** Well, the same thing applied for our P.A.L., which is a few blocks away from it. I went there one night and fortunately my wife went with me.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Are you talking about the Police Athletic League?

**Richard Quintero:** Yes. The town owns the building, and we went there and it was like 7:30 at night. I'm talking to the director, and she says, "Well these kids have been here since 3. They're waiting for mom and dad to come home from work. Some of them, their parents are working two and three jobs." It's to afford the house in Windsor because houses are basically pretty expensive here. [01:35:00] They were. I don't know what they are right now because I know I had a hard time selling my other house to move into this place. But we gave back \$5000 at closing and all of a sudden, everybody wanted to buy the damn thing.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** This is your second house in Windsor, right?

**Richard Quintero:** Yeah, this is a 55 and above, and I'm up near the airport. Believe it or not, I don't hear that many planes because I'm near Runway 1 where they land and they don't make much noise landing.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** And what did you take away about volunteerism that can help in the situation today?

**Richard Quintero:** I don't know. I haven't solved it yet because lifestyles have changed. See the generation before me, it was a big deal to meet and greet and talk about where you wanted to go. Young people today, volunteerism is dead. Look, we all have iPhones. And man, I look at what my daughter can do. She put me on Facebook sitting here for five minutes. She had my organization up on Facebook and I'm like, "Oh my God." That's what these young folks have. They have that, but they're working two or three jobs. And it doesn't mean concurrently. I'm just meaning it could be 3 jobs in in a two day period or whatever. And for them to be going out to a meeting, forget about it.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Yeah, and they don't need a meeting to meet and talk.

**Richard Quintero:** Exactly. And now with Zoom, I was talking to young people in my organization [laughing] and they were they were telling me. They said, "Richard, this is the new norm man." And I had the meetings this year. I had Blue Cross Blue Shield on and I had 52 people on and she answered all of their questions. They were happy as could be. The lady who I talked into being president of my chapter here in Hartford, she said she didn't want to do it. But we had the zoom meeting and we had 32 people. And for me, that's the new norm. Seniors, a lot of them can't drive, so boom. This works.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** So this might be part of the revitalization then.

**Richard Quintero:** Yeah, I think so. I believe it is. I think it's an opportunity because at the last meeting I saw people on Zoom I hadn't seen in about two years. Lady says, "Oh Richard, it's good to see you." I said, "Wow, where have you been?" She said, "Well, I can't drive anymore. My leg is messed up and I can't drive." And I said, "Wow, I didn't know that. We would've come to your house and picked you up." We've got people that do that, but I just think that volunteerism is dead. And we have to find new ways to excite people. Now the other thing that I've run into, and it's not related to this, but maybe it is. It's the fact that the older demographic does not embrace technology. And I told the presidents of around the state that I want a complete listing. I can get it myself, but I'd rather they do it so they understand what's happening. What is the percentage of people that have email addresses in their chapters? Because what I'm going to do is I'm going to find a way to reach those folks even if I have to mail something to them to get them back into the fold. A lot of people don't even have iPhones. They still got the flips.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Right.

**Richard Quintero:** But your earlier question was what is the demographic of Windsor now and I think I answered that. I think it's a younger demographic and that's what you need to embrace if you wanted to revitalize that.



**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Also, finally just what I heard you say as well. So your grandfather's generation, right? He came home, ate dinner, TV and very quiet life, which is not to say there weren't people having a club life. And then there's the other kinds of generations, like the generation of men [01:40:00] who founded organizations like the West Indian Club. And if you think about how those organizations operate, those places wouldn't have worked if the wives were not the ones holding things down elsewhere.

**Richard Quintero:** That's right.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** And then you're talking about generational shifts. Again, you said it has to be relevant. People are not joining organizations that they're not getting anything out of, so that's what I also heard you say. It has to make sense for what is going on in somebody's life. So if it's child care that they need, if it's housing, if it's a job. People need some kind of draw to be connected to an organization because people are not trying to sit around in meetings that serve no purpose.

**Richard Quintero:** That's it in a nutshell, and there are other issues [such] as healthcare, housing, big issues, and a job.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Yeah, a job with health insurance.

**Richard Quintero:** Exactly, and look. Here's the other thing that is hampering everything for people. I worked for the federal government for 42 years. I have healthcare. I've got all my stuff. Well, that person delivering your mail today is a salaried employee with no benefits. It's not just the government doing it, it's the private sector. The private sector's been doing it now for over 15-20 years to save money, to ingratiate the bottom line. And it's like please, not many companies are offering what really needs to be offered to people. So if a job offers you a healthcare, 401K, and all that good stuff, you better embrace it because that's where it's at.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Yeah, I think you decide to have children. I mean, maybe you can decide I can figure it out. I'm young, I don't need health insurance right now. But as soon as you start having children, you are taking your children into that space where every little health emergency turns into an emergency room bill and can lead to disaster and it bankrupts finances. Medical expenses are bankrupting young people.

**Richard Quintero:** Yeah, you're absolutely right. I just sent some money to my nephew and he's in New York. He's got four kids. They both lost their jobs, and I sent him \$1000. I said, "I hope this helps you." Look, it's hard. When we first got married and we were going through a rough patch financially, I went to my aunt, and I asked for 600 bucks. [She said] "You know Richard, we don't do that." So I said, "Okay." I'm sitting there talking to my mother. She was on SSI or something. What does she do? She goes over to the hamper, pulls up the dirty clothes out the way and brings out this little brown bag and she taps it out on the table for me. "Here you go baby." And I'm like oh. [laughing] You know what I'm saying? And that's why I began this when I told you that I miss my mom. I didn't realize how much she loved me. I didn't. I was an ungrateful asshole. Excuse my expression, and I miss her to this day. My daughter does too because one of the things I did to my kid was I took her out on the streets in New York, and I

showed her junkies and prostitutes and everything else. I said, "You don't want to be there." And she told me the other day. She said, "Dad, why did you do that?" I said, "Because I wanted you to know. I have not pulled any punches with you." It's important to be real with your kids. Do you have children?

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** I do. I have three.

**Richard Quintero:** Oh, how old are they?

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** College, high school.

**Richard Quintero:** Wait a minute, timeout. Now how can a 14-year-old have kids in college?

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** [laughing] I have a college senior. I have a high school senior and a 12-year-old. Two older boys and I have a daughter who's 12. So, I'm trying to figure out who they're going to be. [laughing]

**Richard Quintero:** Oh, that's great. You know, I think God was good for me because he gave me my daughter. If I had a son, he would have been sick of me because I would have been cautioning him on how to act in society and he probably wouldn't have liked it. Because look, Black men are treated differently, and black women are treated in a horrible way. [01:45:00] Shoot, my wife had a hard time at UConn. She had two degrees [and] it didn't matter. They treated her like a little mini from someplace. "Hey Beulah, get over here." You know what I'm saying? I hope you've had a pretty good run there at UConn. It's a great school, don't get me wrong. It offers everything. Did you go to school there?

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** No, I went to Princeton [University].

**Richard Quintero:** Oh excuse me. I'm going to hang up now. [laughing]

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** I didn't want to hedge.

**Richard Quintero:** Oh right. Hey look you're with CCNY here. [laughing]

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** No, no. I went to Princeton, but you have to have faith in yourself and even if you're in that kind of environment, you find the people who believe in you. When you're in a elite place and you don't understand necessarily understand how racism works in that elite place, you'll find the people and attach yourself to people who believe in you. And I must say, the one big advantage of Princeton at least is that whatever the context, whatever people's personal beliefs, once you're there, they are willing to test you to see that you belong there. And that testing kind of toughens you up. If people have low expectations of you, you outperform on the you outperform on the test.

**Richard Quintero:** Oh, there is no question about that. So you understand everything I said today because you've experienced it as well and I was speaking to the choir and I didn't realize that. God.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** No, that's fine.

**Richard Quintero:** You look pretty good for a young girl. For a 14-year-old? My Lord, I've been talking to a 14-year-old all this time. [laughing] Listen, you have a good day. It's been a pleasure. I hope I answered your questions.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** No, no, absolutely. These interviews, they go back and forth between a life history and the organizational history. But I always push for the life history part because we need to understand how people bring their life experiences to the organizations and how it influences their point of view. So I really appreciate you taking the time and then you're going to hear from me again because you're getting a transcript to make sure that I've rendered people names and places properly. So I will call you back and get your address and then I need to interview Shirley as well. So if you could tell her to give me a call.

**Richard Quintero:** Shirley who? My wife?

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Yes.

**Richard Quintero:** Good luck, I don't think so.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** You can tell her that you had a great time talking to me, and then you can convince her.

**Richard Quintero:** She's going to say some disparaging things about me.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** I'm giving you that as your homework. That's your homework. I was going to say use the UConn connection. Well, use whatever connection is going to convince her. That's your homework.

**Richard Quintero:** Oh gee, thanks. Have a great day.

**Dr. Fiona Vernal:** Thank you nice to meet you.

**Richard Quintero:** Bye-bye.