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Interview with

John Arango

Conducted by Leanna Hart Gipson
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LEANNA HART GIPSON: This is the oral history interview of John Arango, taken on November the 1st at the NLADA annual convention in Portland, Oregon. Leanna Hart Gipson is conducting the interview. The topic of the interview will be civil program development. John, why don't you tell us a little bit about your background before you became involved with Legal Services?

JOHN ARANGO: Okay. You want me to start real early or -- Let's see. I went to -- I grew up in upstate New York. I went to an engineering school but graduated with a degree in English, then went overseas and served in the Peace Corps for a couple of years in Columbia and came back, did Peace Corps training and then shifted over to doing community organizing for community action program under the Office of Economic Opportunity.

GIPSON: Now, you were in that first Peace Corps class.

ARANGO: Right.

GIPSON: The beginnings of the War on Poverty programs.

ARANGO: Right.

GIPSON: What was it like then?

ARANGO: Actually, it's probably worth recalling that Sargent Shriver, who was the first director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, was also the first director of the Peace Corps and that to a large extent -- maybe not to a large extent, but to some extent, the ideas that he brought into the
Office of Economic Opportunity and particularly the community action program were derived from the Peace Corps experience, and that in fact, the initial -- the earliest staff of the Office of Economic Opportunity were people who were borrowed from the Peace Corps, and so to a certain extent, there was a direct transference in that situation. But the early days of the OEO were essentially -- and again, I guess there's another piece that maybe other people have talked about in this, and that is that the Office of Economic Opportunity was created during the height of the Johnson administration's ability to get out of Congress what they wanted. And essentially, you were literally, when working in a community, in a position where almost every week, there was some new pot of money, some new initiative made available. I mean, the money never flowed like that again. And so it was a particularly heady period because there were all these new opportunities in the community, and your friends were running the major sources of money. So it was a particularly stimulating period to be in. I might just talk about -- a little bit about sort of how -- the pattern within which Legal Services got going. The idea behind the community action program, which is the major part of the War on Poverty, was that local -- that each community would start what was called a community action agency, which would be directed by a community action board. The community action board was to have -- the sort of rule of thumb was one-third poor people allotted. And the rest were to be representatives of a variety of institutions in the community: government, major social service organizations, business and so forth. The idea was that this group would develop a local plan for eliminating poverty, and that was really their charge. And that by assembling a group of people within that board who knew all there was to know about the community, that they would be able to come up with ideas about how to eliminate poverty. As a matter of fact, they -- well, first of all, those groups had a great deal of difficulty figuring out how to eliminate poverty. But even more than that, clearly Shriver and the people in the community action program were under tremendous pressure from the administration to get on with the War on Poverty. And it was awkward to wait for the local community action agencies to figure out how they were going to do it. So Shriver and his people decided to short-circuit the process by creating what were called national emphasis programs, which were basically ideas that came out of Washington that were offered to the local community action agencies as sort of examples of what they might do, pretty much with the understanding that they really had no choice. The first national emphasis program was one called Medicare Alert, in which hordes of volunteers or paid community workers knocked on every
door in poor neighborhoods in the United States to try to identify where elderly poor people were living, in order -- and then when they found them, gave them some information about Medicare, which at that time was a brand-new program and for which you had to sign up. You were not automatically signed up for it if you were a social security recipient. That was a particularly effective program. It lasted only, I think, three or four days. It was almost like a census. But that was particularly effective, first of all, because it worked. I mean, they literally did knock on every door, but also because that provided many of the stories that -- the horror stories about how the elderly poor in the United States were living. People eating dog food, so forth, all came out of that experience.

GIPSON: What was your involvement during this period?

ARANGO: Well, our -- maybe to go back a little bit. I had been working in New Mexico doing Peace Corps training. And the way we did the training was we had full-time community organizers working in low-income communities and then periodically would send out a group of volunteers in training to work with these full-time community organizers to get some sampling of what they would do when they worked overseas. As a result, we had most of the northern counties in northern New Mexico, which were then among the poorest counties in the country, organized in the sense that we had poor people's organizations scattered all over those counties at the time that the OEO was founded. And one day, I was in my office, and these two people appear, and they say, "Well, we're from the newly founded Office of Economic Opportunity regional office in Austin, Texas. And we've been traveling around northern New Mexico. We notice that there's all these community groups formed. And how would you like to have $400,000 to organize the rest of the state?" I mean literally, that was what they said. And we actually had to think about it a little bit, but then we decided that we'd get out of the Peace Corps training business and go into the community organizing business. So what we did -- when we formed community action agencies in New Mexico, we started by organizing the poor first. And once we had the structure of local communities organized, then they elected the representatives of the community action agency. And around those representatives, we then formed the community action agency. So we actually reversed the typical process, which was that the leaders in the community got together and decided they were going to have one of these things
and then went out and tried to find some poor people that they could put on it so they'd have a legal organization. So we were at that point very much in contact with what was going on in poor communities in the state, and because the national emphasis -- and very committed to the idea that we would develop our own approaches to how to eliminate poverty. Although as a matter of fact, when we tried it, we weren't much better at it than people in other parts of the country. But we didn't object much to the idea of national emphasis program like Medicare Alert because that took a very small amount of money. When the next one came along, which was Head Start, that took a substantial chunk of money. And we were a little more doubtful about that one, but we figured -- I mean, it was a very attractive program, and clearly Shriver was very much behind it. And the messages were very strong that you will do this. So that was -- And of course we immediately discovered that the parents in our communities thought it was wonderful. It was -- at that point, we got involved in some very touchy political situations that I don't need to get into here. That led to a Senate committee traveling to New Mexico to hold a hearing about us. And after that hearing, which went very well for us, thanks to the intervention of a member of Senator Robert Kennedy's staff who came out a few days before the committee to sort of tell us how to handle this situation, we were -- we -- Joe Clark, who was the senator that actually conducted the hearing, and a couple of us went out to the house of a prominent attorney in Albuquerque. And in the process of their sort of talking -- I was sort of sitting on the side, and they were talking. They mentioned that there was this new initiative called Legal Services and that -- and then there was some discussion about opening a Legal Service program in Albuquerque. And I remember there sitting and saying to myself, "You mean they're going to take poor people's money and give it to lawyers?" And so that was really my first contact with Legal Services. Clearly I've changed my mind since then, but there was not universal welcoming of Legal Services. And it was really -- I mean, the Head Start program was controlled by parents. And in many instances, the Head Start programs were located in the community. I mean, it could easily have the feel that it was a poor person's program. But Legal Services, at least as it came to New Mexico, was very much money that was going to go to lawyers. And the role that poor people were going to have in controlling it was very unclear at that point. GIPSON: When was your first real contact?

ARANGO: Actually --
ARANGO: A few months after this all took place, I became the special assistant to the regional director in the San Francisco region of the OEO. And almost the first incident that I got involved in was Governor Reagan's first veto of CRLA, so I got introduced to Legal Services very quickly.

ARANGO: Well, there, the entire leadership of the western regional office at that point was made up of lawyers, who were very strongly committed to legal services for the poor. And there was no question --

ARANGO: Larry Horan(?) was the regional director. He was -- this is another former Peace Corps type. He'd been director of the Peace Corps in Colombia, became a good friend of Shriver's, who was also a lawyer, and when he left the Peace Corps became the director of the regional office. Norvel Smith was the deputy director. I'm not sure whether he was a lawyer or not. He left to then become the president of a junior college, Meritt Junior College in Oakland, the first black junior -- actually, any kind of college president in the California educational system history. But he also was very much committed to this program. But then in the general counsel's office -- again, because the regional director was a lawyer, you had very powerful people who were very strongly committed to this program. And we spent -- I mean essentially, the whole function of the top leadership in the western regional office was to fight Governor Reagan. And I spent the 9 or 10 months that I was there, devoted almost all my activities either to putting out -- dealing with political problems in Los Angeles and some other places or trying to deal with Governor Reagan's office. And much of that energy revolved around preserving the legal service program. Although he was equally as -- he was as strongly against community action in general as he was against legal services. He just never figured out how to package his
opposition to community action in a way that would attract as much attention as he could when he went after legal services.

GIPSON: Had you -- that was just a fairly brief period of time that you were involved with Legal Services?

ARANGO: Right. Yeah. I was -- go ahead.

GIPSON: Had you formed an opinion? What did you think about Legal Services' offices?

ARANGO: Well, I mean, clearly when you saw CRLA and the kinds of things that you were doing, there was no question that that was the right thing to do. But I think it would be fair to say that at least -- I mean, sometime in the middle of it -- this was 1968 that I spent, which was a very unusual year to be spending in a kind of a poverty program, but about the middle of that year, it was clear that the War on Poverty was over. First of all, Tet had happened at the beginning of the year, and it was clear that the commitments of soldiers that were being made to Vietnam made it impossible to sustain the kind of commitment to the War on Poverty that was going to be required. And the riots that occurred after Martin Luther King's assassination, combined with the riots around the Democratic Convention, all indicated that this notion of sort of activating people at the community level was going to be a very unpopular idea and would certainly never survive a change to the Nixon administration, so that Larry Horan and I virtually the day after Nixon was elected decided that it was time to go find something else to do. So –

GIPSON: Was that a depressing period?

ARANGO: Well, I'm not sure "depressing" was the right -- I mean, it was a crisis period because literally one week after another, there was something happening that required mobilization of resources to try to deal with it, with a problem. And so I'm not sure -- I mean, we were certainly depressed after Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy were assassinated, but I'm not sure that -- you didn't have time to sort of dwell on that because the next day, there was a -- some big incident going on, some other governor raising some issue. There was a Congresswoman named
Edith Green who had a role in Legal Services later on, who passed a series of amendments to the Community Action Act which essentially limited the ability of poor people and local boards to make certain kinds of decisions. And that required a full restructuring of the community action programs in the whole region. And so there was sort of one thing after another that was coming down and didn't have much time for feelings. But I think within that context, it was clear that community action, as it was originally designed, which probably never really got going in the United States, but as it was originally designed was not going to last much beyond the '60s and probably not beyond 1968. And so at that point, things like Head Start and Legal Services and the Job Corps looked like really good ideas because they at least had the possibility of lasting beyond the time that community action was.

GIPSON: It was about five years then before you came back?

ARANGO: Right. Then I went overseas for five years and then came back.

GIPSON: Was Legal Services different?

ARANGO: Well, I mean, again, the only -- as someone who had seen only CRLA as the model, I think Legal Services was clearly different.

GIPSON: In what way?

ARANGO: Well, actually, my original contact with Legal Services in the '70s was again another one of these Peace Corps contacts. The director of the Peace Corps for Latin America -- they were divided into regions, and they had their own regional directors -- was also chairman of the board of an organization called Planning Assistance, which was essentially an ex-volunteer organization, a nonprofit management consulting group, if you can believe that. And it had gotten a contract with the National Legal Aid & Defender Association to help Legal Service programs prepare plans specifically to deal with the issue of an overwhelming number of cases. And the way that that project had been set up was a manual had been written on how to do planning, which was being field-tested in a variety of programs around the country. And one of
the programs that it was being field-tested in was Albuquerque, which was the place where I happened to be moving to. And I passed through this office of Planning Assistance, and they essentially said, "Well, since you're going to Albuquerque, would you like to get involved in helping us carry out this planning process?" And I said, "Sure," partly because I didn't have a job and because it sounded like an interesting thing to do. So after a period of time, I called up the local program and said, I'm coming in, and I'd like to talk to you about this planning. And they said, well, that's fine, because there's someone coming out from NLADA, and Tony Locricchio(?), who at that point was the director of the program in Flint, Michigan and the acknowledged guru within Legal Services on planning, was going to be there.

GIPSON: Do you remember who the program director was in that –

ARANGO: Yeah. Michael Brawdy(?) was the director, and John Joyce was the -- he wasn't the civil director. Within the civil division of NLADA -- it was so big at that point, that you had separate divisions. He was in charge of the technical assistance division of NLADA, and that unit was funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity to provide technical assistance to field programs. Catholic University had the contract to do training. NLADA had the contract to do technical assistance. So anyways, I put on my suit and tie and went to this Legal Services office. And it was on two stories. And they said, "Just wait downstairs, and they'll be down in a minute." And so I'm sitting there, sort of looking at my book, and I hear somebody coming down the steps. And I look up, and here are these three hippies walking down the stairs, with their hair way out to here and dressed in jeans and stuff. And it took me a minute to realize that this was the technical assistance director of NLADA and the director of the legal service program. And I said, "Hmm. This is not quite what I had expected from a law office." But I very quickly discovered that the program was really doing excellent work. And it didn't take me long to realize that Legal Services was a terrific organization to hook up with in terms of thinking about carrying out whatever was left of the War on Poverty.

GIPSON: When your name comes up, there are certain projects that immediately come to my mind, at least. Priority setting obviously is one area. Expansion. And I think also a lot of the retrenchment and survival times of the early '80s. Would you comment on –
ARANGO: Well, I probably should say a little bit about priority setting because I think that's the one that I may have had the most influence on. It's important to -- the priority setting movement in Legal Services got started from the ground up in the sense that the way that priority setting operated before the Legal Service Corporation was created was that NLADA would make a grant to a program of about two to three thousand dollars out of the technical assistance money. They then would hire someone to come in and help them do the priority setting process, which at that point, was defined as a large meeting. The way it would be typically created or set up was a group: all the staff, all of the board and around an equal number of clients. So the group, ideal group, is about 50 percent clients, 50 percent staff and board of the program; would go off to a retreat setting somewhere on a Friday afternoon. And then -- and by Sunday, they would have a set of -- they would have a plan for the program. We didn't call it priorities then. We called it a plan. And the typical arrangement would be -- and this was all done voluntarily. There was no regulation governing priorities at that point. And so NLADA would look for volunteer programs that would do this. And when they got one, they got the money, they would give them the money. And the typical way that this thing was set up was Friday night, you would do something called a green light, which is you'd just -- you'd sit everybody in a big room, and you'd ask them what kinds of things should the program be working on? And we'd write those on cards, which we'd put up in the front of the room. And in the typical session, you'd have two or three hundred separate issues, problems, whatever. And it covered the full range. Help welfare mothers. Do lobbying. So some were strategy, some were problems. And you'd cover the wall with these things. And then overnight, we'd organize them into categories generally along the lines of education, welfare, things like that. Then you'd spend basically all of Saturday in small groups, with the small groups sort of developing a clearer sense of what the problems were in this issue area and then suggesting particular activities that could be undertaken. These would be brought back to the meeting on Sunday morning, and then we would do a quick straw vote of all the people there. One man/one vote. One person/one vote. And that would give some sense of how the group thought that these reports that came out of the various small groups should be ranked in terms of access to resources. And then we would typically set aside two to three hours for what we called lobbying, which was a time for people who didn't like the results of the first vote to try to persuade the group to vote differently on the second vote, which was the binding vote.
And generally there would be massive change from one to the other as clients or staff or board got up and said, "I'd like to speak for income maintenance, which got a low vote, and try to explain to you why it's important and why you should vote for it." And it was a fascinating process. It had some strengths and weaknesses, but it was clearly an event. I mean, after you went through one of those things -- I mean, it was a tremendous educational event, I think for everybody, staff, clients, board and so forth. Then a couple of weeks later, the consultant would come back to the program and sit down with the staff and take the results of this vote and essentially reallocate resources within the program to match the results of the vote. Not necessarily that the issue that got the most votes would necessarily get the most resources, but staff were asked to sort of map out, in order to accomplish this piece of work, how many staff would you need, how much time, how many clients and things like that. And in the ideal setup, the one that ranked the highest would get all the resources it needed to carry out. And then as you went down the line, you would start cutting back in order to go far enough down the line that the program felt satisfied that they were working on enough issues to be creditable in the community. That was an entirely voluntary process. And it was very unpopular in Legal Services. Starting in 1976 when the corporation first got organized and did their first rounds of training for managers, because there had been very little training for managers during the early part of the '70s, I was on the training team, and my function was always to hold a briefing on planning and then to answer questions from the program directors. And boy, I mean, they just thought that this was a very bad idea.

GIPSON: What were some of their objections?

ARANGO: Well, I mean, I think they fell into a number of categories. The first one was the whole idea that in some way we would limit access. And we had long, involved explanations that tried to explain to them that in fact they were limiting access using the techniques that they had at that point, which was typically to set aside a certain portion of staff time for what they called emergencies and thereafter to limit intake as a means of controlling the number of cases. So what the typical office would do -- they might be open for intake on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. And whoever got there on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday got through the door. And if you got there on Thursday and Friday, it didn't matter what the nature of your case was or
whether it was something that the program had been looking for years, you just didn't get through the door. And other offices would have open intake. Generally at that point, you had to come to the office. They wouldn't do intake over the telephone, but you had to come to the office. But anybody who came to the office was accepted until the staff simply collapsed under the weight of their caseload. And then they just closed off intake. And we visited programs where there had been no intake for six months. We also visited offices that tried to go the other way and say, well, if we have to limit intake, we will close down, but we will keep emergencies open because those are the people who really need it. And they had a list of what emergencies were. We visited one program that had an emergency- emergency-emergency list. That is, they had gone through three layers of emergencies and been so overwhelmed with cases, that they were now on their third level of emergencies in order to get through the door. So we tried to explain to people that that was really a method of limiting access and that they would be much better off to limit access according to some predefined manageable set of priorities rather than according to whoever happened to run through the door. But that was a big change. I mean, people really thought they were in the business of providing access to the legal system and objected to the idea that you would control that in some predetermined way. And they had a lot of trouble with the shift. And I think they even had a lot of trouble understanding that there was a better way to live. I mean, people had become so accustomed to the idea that you ought to be -- that you ought to be open to everyone, and so accustomed to being overwhelmed with cases, that when someone came in and said, "Well, you don't have to live that way," there was just some -- I mean, it was like telling the emperor that they had no clothes. They just said, well -- I mean, "What do you mean we don't have any clothes?" And it took -- it really took from -- even with the writing of the priority setting regulation, which I think came out in '78, it took until 1978 before programs really bought into the idea of planning. So it was really about a five-year period from about '73 to '78 before programs bought into the concept that planning was a good thing. And it was not uncommon in '77 and early '78 to go -- to still hear pretty strong objections in project director meetings or in training to the idea that you should have priorities and that it was a good thing. Actually, the sort of -- the key event I think in establishing priority setting as an idea within Legal Services was a -- well, it was two things. It was -- and it's going to take me a minute to remember the names. But anyways, after the corporation got going, the training division was given the responsibility that previously had -- for the priority setting. And there was
a man named Andy Azell(?), who was -- I think his title was the assistant to the director of training, Dick Clark. And his function was to sort of manage this priority setting process. And he continued to make the grants to programs that enabled them to do this. And he also arranged for us to have access to the director training. But at some point, he realized that he really needed to get some support higher up. And so he arranged for Clint Bamberger's assistant, special assistant, to come out to a priority setting that we did just down the road in Salem and then another one that we did in Tacoma that happened to be sort of back to back, I mean within a few days of each other, and to observe this process. And that helped. I mean, she went back and said, "This looks like a good thing." It was clearly helpful. These programs needed this sort of thing, and that was useful. And as a result of that, a conference was called in Washington that involved the director of field services -- Clint Bamberger actually called it, so it was Clint's conference, but he had the director of the three offices and then brought in a group of project directors that had participated in this process to talk about it. Alan Houseman thought this was the dumbest idea he'd ever heard. And he was very much opposed to this whole planning thing and priority setting and all that. He thought it just got in the way. But fortunately we had had a very successful planning process with Evergreen Legal Services. And we don't have to get into details, but it really worked beautifully. And Greg Dallaire(?) was invited -- actually Alan Houseman sat down with me and said, "Well, who ought we to invite to this thing?" And I said, "Well, you certainly ought to invite Greg Dallaire." And he said, "Greg Dallaire?" And he clearly figured that Greg Dallaire would just blow this thing out of the water, in part because there was this tremendous political battle going on between Greg Dallaire and Tony Locricchio. And so he thought, I think, that when I suggested Greg Dallaire, I must be totally out of my mind and that by getting Greg Dallaire there, we were certainly going to sink this whole idea. So I'm sure that he -- GIPSON: So he invited Greg Dallaire.

ARANGO: And so he invited Greg Dallaire. And of course Greg Dallaire got there and stood up and said this was terrific because what had happened in that particular planning process is Greg - Evergreen Legal Services had been formed by merging together a bunch of tiny little OE -- community action-based legal service programs into the Seattle program and then -- and Greg was put in charge of it. There was tremendous differences within the program over what was then called impact and service, what percentage of the resources should be devoted to larger
cases, with the small OEO programs clearly on the side of service. Their representatives controlled the board of Evergreen Legal Services. And so what we managed to do during the planning process was to get the board to agree -- well, the staff and the board and the clients all agreed -- I believe it was that at least a third or maybe 40 percent of the program resources should go to activities that were more than individual service. So through this process in one weekend, we solved a tremendous difficulty for Greg Dallaire, which was how he was going to take this board that was committed to individual service and turn them around to doing -- So he really thought that planning was a good idea. And that's what he said in this meeting. And actually Alan by the end of the meeting was a supporter. And Clint Bamberger said this is something that we're going to do and instructed the training division at that point to make much more money available for planning and priority setting. And that really kicked it off. Shortly after that, we got into the big discussion about whether there should be a priority setting regulation. Of course there had to be because the language was in the act. But I think it would be fair to say that within the group that was working on planning, we felt that the priority setting regulation was a mistake, that planning was much better done as a voluntary activity that programs came to understand that they needed and then did it, rather than as something that was forced down their throat. But the regulation had to be written. And so then there was a lot of jockeying around precisely how it would be written. And I think ultimately it came out to be a good thing. But I should make one other point. And that is that the clear intent of the planning movement within Legal Services was to define what it was that a program should do rather than to define what a program would not do. And actually I remember it was about in 1980 or so, I got a call from NLADA, and they said, well, we have a little bit of money left over, and we're still interested in kind of doing things. It must have been '79 or '80. I can't remember when. We're still interested in sort of helping programs do this sort of planning thing, and we've gotten this interesting proposal from a program in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. They want to do priority setting, but they want to identify the cases that they will not do, rather than the cases that they will do. Would you be interested? And I said, well, gee, I mean, that's -- I mean, we've never thought about it in that way, but why not? I mean, let's try it and see whether this is going to work. So we went up there. And basically we had the same sort of group -- client, staff and board -- sit down and identify what the program would not do. And they loved it. And I kept saying to myself there's something wrong here. I mean, this just is not -- this is not the way it's supposed to
be. But since the program's satisfied and everybody thinks it's a good thing to do, I guess it's a good thing to do. I should have recognized that basically we had opened Pandora's box with that process. And certainly by now, 10 years later, priority setting is clearly a process that defines what a program will not do rather than what a program will do. And so rather than being what I think Tony Locricchio originally thought of and the people who had planning in mind, which was, one, to give clients much more voice in determining what programs would do, and secondly, to shift the agenda towards a proactive agenda where the program would define here is a group that needs our services and we are going to marshal our resources in a planned way to work on that problem to produce some benefit in the community which we can all identify and work towards, that is totally gone from priority setting now. And now it is basically what Williamsport asked for, which is a process to determine what it was -- what it is that the program will not do. And that is about as far as you could possibly get from the original intent in the planning movement within Legal Services.

GIPSON: Would you care to talk a little bit about your involvement with the expansion process?

ARANGO: Right. Again, this may be some -- excuse me -- some internal -- about -- Well, there was a large battle in the early days of the Legal Service Corporation over whether extra funds as they were made available by Congress would go to the existing programs, which were in desperate shape. I mean, essentially your typical Legal Service program in 1974, '75 was patched together with a whole variety of funding sources. And in fact, the money from the OEO was often a third of the total budget of the Legal Service programs.

GIPSON: What were these other funding sources?

ARANGO: The other funding sources were a variety of jobs programs that made people available to nonprofit social service organizations. So typically you would have a couple of lawyers on your staff -- let's say a six-person staff might be two lawyers that were put there by a variety of jobs programs, a couple of Vista volunteers, who were attorneys because Vista at that point recruited attorneys and put them in there, maybe a Reggie and a director and maybe a couple of attorneys who were paid for out of OEO funds. And lots of soft money, and so people
would be coming and going. And the job training program would change its rules. And all of a sudden, someone who was there couldn't be there. And it was a very -- very difficult to organize. Very fluid. You never knew from one day to the next how many people you were going to have. So it was a very hard thing to organize. And Legal Services' budget had been basically flat from '69 or so. And so nobody had gotten a raise in years, and it was a very hard place to work. So there was tremendous pressure from the existing programs to take any new funds and invest them in the existing programs. Clearly the board, the new board of the corporation -- Tom Ehrlich favored expansion, largely on the ground that I think, if you counted the number of Congressional districts that had a Legal Service program, I think you would have discovered that only a minority of the districts had a Legal Service program. And so if you were talking about getting more support [telephonic interruption] out of Congress, you would have to put more people into -- You want to get it or -- (Pause)

GIPSON: That sounds good.

ARANGO: So anyways, there was clearly pressure from the top from Tom Ehrlich and the board to do expansion. And my recollection is there were some fairly intense discussions about this, and a compromise was reached that some of the money would go into building up the existing programs and some would go into expansion. At that point, they got together a group of experienced project directors to talk about how should we do the expansion. And coming out of that meeting was essentially one principle, which is don't repeat the mistakes of the past. Unfortunately what they forgot to identify was what were the mistakes that were not to be repeated. So then recognizing that new money was going to be going out to the field, a decision was made within the corporation that -- let's see, the office of field services would handle the actual new grants. And a structure was created in terms of the regional offices were given responsibility for going into new communities and kind of getting something together. And the training division, the office of support, I guess it was called -- I forget its exact name -- was given responsibility for doing training for new programs and for providing what was in essence technical assistance. And the whole thing, the assistance effort was called Project Takeoff. And Joan Lieberman and I designed the training that was going to be done for the new and expansion projects. And we don't need to go -- I mean, it was fairly standard training. There was nothing
special about it. And then the training division was supposed to set up this network of technical assistance that would be made available to the new and expansion programs. Well, for a variety of reasons, that didn't work. They had -- they kept accumulating this money, but they couldn't spend the money that the office of field services was giving -- Actually, that was it. The office of field services got the money to do technical assistance, but they decided that they would give it to the training division to actually do the work. And it wasn't working. So at some point after we'd done a variety of these trainings -- actually Vicor Geminiani, who was at that point working in the office, and Clint and Bucky called me in and said we're going to take the money back. We want you to help us design this project. I said to them, I think the best way to do this is to work for the regional offices, who are the people that have got the information. So Steve Granberg, who was another person who at that time was working in the Washington office, and I jumped on the plane, I mean literally that day, and flew out to the Chicago regional office and sat down with the Chicago regional staff and said we're the new Project Takeoff. And what we want to do is to talk to you about how we might provide assistance to your new and expansion programs. The way we'd like to do it is let's just sit down here, and program by program, we'll go through all the programs in your region, and you'll tell us which are expansion and describe the kinds of problems you have there. And then we'll work out a strategy for that particular program, which are your new programs that -- Chicago, I don't think -- well, they had a couple in Wisconsin. They had very few brand-new programs, but they had lots of expansion programs. And it worked like a charm. I mean, and the regional office people said, well, no one ever asked us before. I mean, sort of -- and this is really a good idea. I mean, to actually have a specific strategy for each one of the programs. And so we made the circuit around all the regional offices and got a variety of responses, but I think Chicago and Atlanta being very strongly committed to this idea; Denver not giving us much attention at all. The rest of the regions didn't have that much expansion, but if you had Atlanta and you had Chicago, you were covering major parts of the country in terms of the expansion areas. And at that point, I then went back to -- well, then we needed -- so the -- what we identified in most instances was the need for an experienced project director to go in and work with a new project director, or for someone who had managed expansion in another area to go in and help the program design their expansion. That led us to recognize that we probably needed to give some training to the people that we're going to use as consultants. And again, with Joan Lieberman, we developed something called a live laboratory, where we brought
in people that we thought would make good consultants for other programs and actually ran them through the process of identifying strengths and weaknesses in a program. We brought -- what we did was we asked the program to be a guinea pig. And they would bring two or three other staff people in. And they would be available for -- it was almost as if you were doing an on-site visit, except there were many more consultants than you would have. The staff would be made available. They could be interviewed about what was going on, and we asked them to talk about their real program. And then our teams of consultants in training would go off and try to figure out what was going on in this program, what they should do. And then they'd come back and try -- they'd make these recommendations to the staff from the guinea pig program. Then we'd cut off the process, and we'd say, okay. Now, guinea pig program, talk to us about how it felt. I mean, were they good questions? How well did they come over? And then we'd ask the consultants in training, how did it feel to you to be doing this and where did you have problems and so forth? I think it was very effective training, but what it led to was a group of people who had now been trained in kind of diagnostic skills and communication skills to go back in these programs. They were made available to the programs that actually did the work. It turned out to be terrific training for the consultants because they got to see how some other people were doing it. They got to put themselves in a position of providing this assistance to programs and seeing things from a somewhat different perspective. So in addition to helping the programs, and I think we really did help the programs, it also was a kind of an advanced management training that otherwise wouldn't have been available. We spent, as I recall, about $130,000 a year in this effort. And essentially the way the process would work was a regional office would call up and say, "We have this need." And I did this all out of my office in New Mexico. They would call up and say, "We have this need." I'd say, "Fine. I'd recommend so-and-so." They'd say, "That's fine." I'd then call up that person and ask them if they could spend two or three days in this program. And then I would essentially authorize the release of travel money and a small consulting fee. And we pretty well spent the whole amount of money each year. And that was -- I think it was a very effective effort. I mean, we -- certainly the reports we got back from the new programs was that this kind of thing was very helpful to them.

GIPSON: Slightly less happy subject, retrenchment.
ARANGO: Right. Well, I mean, it was truly ironic to be in a situation where literally one month, we were finishing up Project Takeoff. I mean, the minimum access had been achieved. Each year as -- in the annual reports that were sent to Congress, and more and more of the map was colored in terms of counties served by Legal Service programs. Here we were in 1980. The map had now been fully colored in. There was now, at least in theory, a Legal Service program -- access to a Legal Service program available in every county in the United States. And almost at the time that we sort of finished up that process, we immediately went into retrenchment. And it was really -- I mean, it was weird to be going back to programs that I had been in the year before, helping them to double or triple in size, and now tell them how to cut back by one third. There were -- all of this blurs in my mind because in addition to talking -- to coordinating, in some ways, the retrenchment process -- that was a more complex process -- the survival of Legal Services was going on at the same time. And I was also coordinating those regional meetings. But basically, the way we did it was -- the way we handled retrenchment was -- there were really two efforts. One was University of Pennsylvania Wharton School, which had done a variety of consultations with the office of field services staff, prepared a series of papers about retrenchment in Legal Services, which were widely distributed and sort of formed the intellectual base of the retrenchment movement. But we had a couple of meetings in Washington at which we brought together some of the consultants that we'd developed in the expansion process, along with some regional office staff that had particular skills in this, and sort of sat down and said, well, what would be our advice to the programs? And it was fairly simple. I mean, we essentially said it's better to cut all at once than in little dribbles. It's better to cut back more than you need so that you will have some expansion possibility built into your program, that you can provide raises and things like that. It's probably -- if you're going to cut back -- because at that point, we didn't know how far back we were going to have to cut, but we certainly considered the possibility that you might have to cut back to a very small size. And so there was a lot of talk about if you had to preserve one thing of all the things that Legal Services did, what would it be that you would preserve? And the answer we came up with was to preserve intake. That if you came -- if you shrank down to just a two- or three-person office that could handle a small number of -- a very small number of cases, and otherwise you'd really be depending on referrals to the private bar or to some resources out there, that if you controlled the intake; that is, if you were seeing every client that was going through the pro -- through this process, and you could selectively pick one
out of 100 to represent with your very limited staff resources, that you'd still maintain then
control of the ability to affect the agenda in the entire community by being highly selective in the
cases that you picked to achieve maximum impact on the community. So our sense was, our
advice was: If worse comes to worst, hold on to intake because that would give you the ability to
see all the legal problems in the community and to use your very limited resources just in the
areas where you're going to have the maximum amount of impact. And we packaged this in a
videotape that we made right at the time that it was pretty clear -- well, actually still before the
time that we knew what the impact of the cuts was going to be. And that videotape is around. But
it basically presented in a series -- kind of two-hour, three-hour vignettes of about five minutes
each, a list of all the issues that you needed to address, a list of all the options that were available
for handling those problems, and a sort of -- a description of this whole scheme of how we
thought that retrenchment should be managed. Also Victor Geminiani, who at that point was the
regional director in Atlanta, convened a series of meetings of his project directors modeled on
the live lab, where a program would volunteer to come in. We'd assemble a group of project
directors, and we'd all sit around talking about how we would retrench that program and giving
specific advice to the program about who should be cut, how many positions should be cut,
whether offices should be closed or not closed, and this sort of whole discussion of how you
might go about cutting down this program. I think that was very helpful. Probably a tremendous
shock for everybody that went through it because it was really the first time that they had to
address the fact that they were -- at that time, we knew, and so it was, you know, you're going to
have to cut one third of -- I guess it was 20 or 25 percent of your money and one third of your
staff. In the South, retrenchment had much less impact than it had in the rest of the country
because you had so many new and expansion programs who still had very substantial reserves
left over. Because the process of creating the programs was much slower than the process of
giving out the money, you had programs in the South that had a million dollars in the bank at the
time that retrenchment came, and so they could cushion the impact. And so the retrenchment
process, although we recommended that it be done immediately after the cuts were apparent, in
fact stretched out over probably a period of three or four years by the time that everybody went
through the retrenchment. But it was a planned effort. And I think it was interesting because we
predicted that in many instances, retrenchment would be a good thing because it would cut out a
lot of sloppy habits that had developed during this incredible period during the late '70s when
programs had more money than they could spend. And in fact, even within a few months of the time that most programs had to go through retrenchment, we were getting reports back from project directors that it was clear that while it was an extremely painful process in terms of the sort of relationships that existed within the program, that in fact they were able to preserve much of the core functions of the -- That was another one of our pieces of advice, which was to identify what you did best and preserve that, if you possibly could. That in fact, they had been able to do that and that they felt -- the phrase that was used then was that they were leaner but meaner, that they were more focused on what it was that they were trying to do, and that cutting out some of the extraneous activities in fact had been a helpful process. Although I don't think any of us really understood at that point what the impact of closing massive numbers of outreach offices and neighborhood offices was going to be. I mean, already in the late '70s, there had been the sort of professionalization effort or movement, which was that we were no longer an antipoverty organization. We were law firms. And we shouldn't have these small neighborhood offices out there where people didn't have access to a good library and were out of touch with other lawyers. We should centralize into a downtown office where we looked more like a law firm, although I mean, it was laughable because they certainly didn't look anything like a law firm. But that all the lawyers should be brought together with access to the kind of technology and library that they needed and to the professional interaction that was necessary. So that movement was already under way, and many of the neighborhood offices were being closed. I mean, you could already see the end of neighborhood-based legal services. But that process was given an incredible boost by retrenchment, which resulted in massive closing of neighborhood offices and of outreach offices in rural areas. And I don't think any of us really understood how different Legal Services was going to be because of the closing of those offices and that in fact, one of the real prices of retrenchment was the end of any even half serious attempt to achieve access. I mean, many of the programs that went through expansion truly thought that as they opened offices in outlying towns, that they were going to -- they were at least going to make a run at providing access to everybody in their service area. But retrenchment -- within a year or two years, that idea was gone because after retrenchment action, it was clear that access as a goal for Legal Services was dead.

GIPSON: When do you think programs were the healthiest in Legal Services?
ARANGO: The healthiest? Actually, I'd probably say probably right after retrenchment. Maybe '81, '82. In that period. You can't exaggerate the impact that expansion had on programs, particularly on the ones that underwent tremendous expansion. I mean, there was -- it was wonderful in the sense that there was all this new money and energy, but it was incredibly disruptive. And then to be followed by the survival effort, and then to be followed -- and then simultaneously or immediately to be followed by retrenchment and by the beginning of private attorney involvement, I mean, those were all very discombobulating. I think that when programs that survived that process were in the early '80s, and maybe it was a little bit later, but were in their lean and mean phase, that that was probably when they were the healthiest. They still hadn't felt the impact of continuing inflation. They were -- the corporation had not yet gotten organized for this assault in terms of monitoring and evaluation, so programs were left relatively alone. They had budgets that were more than adequate to cover their operations. They had just been through the survival effort and were feeling very self-confident. And I think that -- I would identify that period as probably being -- and it was very short. I mean measured in months, not years, when things were really in good shape. Then the monitoring and evaluation started hitting. Then the impact of inflation and a static or actually decreasing budget in terms of inflation began to make itself felt. And I think those were then the beginning of the kinds of times that we see right now.

GIPSON: Do you think we're in our worst time? Or have there been other times that you think were really worse for us?

ARANGO: I think actually the mid-'70s were worse. I mean, when I first came into Legal Services, I think these programs that were jerry-rigged out of, you know, a little bit of staff from this and a little bit of staff from that were clearly weaker than the programs we have right now. But I think morale right now -- I mean, I've just been at a couple of statewide meetings, and my sense is morale now is down. And even though we've had good success in terms of our recent funding increase and prospects for maybe even doing better in the future, I think that we're now maybe coming out of the -- we're either in the depression phase or maybe starting to come out of it, that resulted from the 1988 election when -- I mean, clearly what happened during the '80s
was people were saying, well, we're going through this horrible time, but in 1988, there will be this massive change and then everything will be back to where it was before. And in fact, there were meetings that were held in the sort of late -- well, '86, '87, where people were sitting around -- I mean project directors were literally sitting around talking about, well, when we get back control of the Legal Service Corporation, are we going to want to put in place something that we had in the late '70s or do we want to do something different? So there was this very palpable hope, I mean, that was manifested in action that in 1988, it was all going to be over and we were going to be back and everything would be fine. And when that didn't happen, the reaction took a while to make itself apparent, but I think -- and then there was -- then there was this sort of -- I mean, people said, well, we're going to have to give up the hope. But then there was this sort of minor hope, which was, well, maybe the Bush administration won't be quite so bad. And now it's apparent that the Bush administration in fact will be just as bad. Maybe not so much for Legal Services, but certainly for poor people. And I think it's sort of the last elimination of any hope that attention will be focused on the needs of the poor that we're seeing right now. And that's really depressing.

GIPSON: It's been said by a lot of people that know you well that your major contribution to Legal Services has been your ability to step back and kind of take the pulse. Would you care to comment on that?

ARANGO: Well, I don't know if that's true because I think a lot of people had a role in that. I mean, every -- I did feel, and maybe I still do, that every once in a while -- that because I'm not -- I mean, I don't work for Legal Services and I live in a place like New Mexico which is very far removed from Washington, that I did have -- and I've always -- because I started in sort of -- my first contact with Legal Services, at least starting in the '70s, was coming in at the request of a program to do something at a program. And I think I've always felt that my primary allegiance was to the programs and not to the Legal Service Corporation, even though they kept me alive for a long period of time. But because I always felt -- I mean, I felt uneasy when I hadn't spent a period of time in a program; that I did perform a function which was to be able to sort of communicate back to the decision makers that something was happening in enough programs that it was time to respond to that. And whether that was that the directors and new programs
were really getting strung out and they needed some help or that we couldn't let the retrenchment process just run some sort of course, that we needed to get ourselves organized and respond to that, or later on that the agenda that was emerging in '79 and '80, which was namely that -- I mean, in '79 and '80, there was a question about now that we've achieved minimum access, what do we do? I mean, what's the next piece? And clearly the rumbling was we ought to focus on quality. We sort of had it all now, but now we need to turn our attention to how well was it doing what it was supposed to do. And certainly one of the -- I think in the early '80s, one of the things that I contributed was to say, well, we've lost control of the corporation so we can't run the quality agenda from within the corporation, but we can still have a quality agenda. And maybe it ought to be focused on something like excellence in the delivery of legal services. So I don't know whether I -- I'm not sure that I took the pulse of Legal Services, but I was sort of the vehicle of communicating what seemed to me to be emerging ideas within the field, things that I'd pick up at meetings like this and talking to project directors and kind of crystallize them and put them in a package that I could communicate to the decision makers that I think it's now time to move in this agenda. And I think it will succeed because I'm hearing it in the field. And my sense has always been it's much easier to go with the flow than it is to go against it. And so similarly, when we were thinking about the survival effort and there was a real question about whether we could turn to the programs and ask them to participate in what was in essence a massive lobbying effort to save the Legal Services Corporation, I mean, there was real doubt in Washington that going out to the field and saying to project directors that had never been involved in any kind of lobbying effort that you need to talk to your local bar, you need to talk to, you know, your Congressman, you need to mobilize a local effort that was going to communicate to Washington we wanted Legal Services preserved, I mean, there was real doubt that that was going to work. And when we -- the first meeting we had in the survival effort was in St. Louis. And one of my jobs was to not only draft the agendas, work out the agenda for these meetings, but then to go to each one and watch to see what was happening. And I mean, literally, I was calling back during the St. Louis meeting to Washington, saying it's really working. You know, we're not going to have any problem mobilizing these people. I mean, that was one of the functions that I could perform is that I could go out and sort of take a quick look at what was happening and then communicate back to Washington, this is going to work or don't do -- this is not going to work. Forget it. Fortunately survival worked.
GIPSON: Well, you mentioned that much of your work has been with local programs. And we've talked about three major projects or issues that you've been through: expansion and priority setting and retrenchment. How do you think Washington handled each of these issues for themselves? I don't mean for the field. How did Washington priority-set, and how did they deal with expansion? And I've heard a lot of stories about how Washington dealt with retrenchment. Would you care to comment on that?

ARANGO: Well, my sense is that Legal Services in general has been very well-managed, at least from the time that the corporation was created and probably all the way back, but I didn't have personal knowledge of many of the earlier days or I only saw the results in the field. But I always felt that the Washington staff was very sensitive to the sort of broad currents that were going on, very willing to listen to what the field had to say, and rarely got in the way of what was appropriate to do in the field at any given time. I mean, if you really look back and said compared to other federal agencies, how well did the Legal Service Corporation do in the late '70s, I think you would have to say they did spectacularly well. I mean, they managed a tripling in size of the program with no scandals, you know, no creation of programs that were a disaster from the beginning and never got off the ground, while sustaining a -- and building up a network of, in many instances, very weak programs. Or programs such as Evergreen that were packaged against any logic. And nevertheless, got them through and got many of them performing very well. And then faced with this sea change in the way -- well, fortunately not in 1981, in who was running it, but moving literally in a year from completing minimum access to the need to shrink, immediately shifted their whole point of view and concentrated on now we've got to manage -- just as we managed the expansion process, now we've got to manage the shrinking process. And you know, people didn't quit. People didn't tear out their hair. They simply said this is the next job that needs to be done, and let's do it. Now, there was lots of arguing and yelling and screaming and backbiting within the corporation, but it never got in the way of really achieving what was the fundamental agenda. And you know, clearly the retrenchment and survival process depended a lot on Joan Lieberman and her ability to get the directors of the various offices to work together, and you know, I assume that she's been videotaped on this also. But I mean, the process of having four or five people work together to handle survival and retrenchment at the
same time was really an exceptional effort and one that I think Joan made a big contribution to, although obviously Legal Services was extraordinarily lucky to have people like Clint Lyons and Alan and Bea Mitchell and Gerry Singsen and others available -- Dan Bradley to -- you know, in those positions at that time. But I certainly -- I mean, certainly one of the reasons why we've all been so disappointed in the performance of the corporation during the '80s has been that it was such an exceptional agency in the late '70s, that in comparison -- I mean, even if the corporation in the '80s had been moderately well-managed, it would have looked bad, but in comparison to what was there before, I mean, you just say God. They had -- I mean, they were handed this incredible resource that had proven its ability to influence attitudes in the field in any number of ways, and they just pissed it away. And that was really -- that was -- that was -- among many other sorry episodes, that was among the sorriest.

GIPSON: You have worked for many years with Joan. What are your strongest memories?

ARANGO: Well, certainly the strongest memories, I think, revolve around her feeling of caring for the people that she was working with. I mean, you could hardly imagine someone who on a personal level felt more strongly the need to help and to understand. She was just remarkable in her sense of communicating both to the people she was working with and to everyone else how much she cared for the people that she was working for. And I think the other strong impression is that -- I mean, she was brilliant in terms of her ability to analyze what was going on. And to a large extent, I mean, we're still running on many of the ideas that she laid out 10 years ago. And obviously she was -- although I didn't see this part of her in action, but her ability to work with the key people in the corporation during 1981 and to help them through this very difficult process was a major contribution because if the key people in the corporation had not acted with high effectiveness in 1981, we could easily have lost the survival battle, or we could have lost the retrenchment battle and ended up with something that had survived that wasn't worth the effort that went into survival. And so I mean, she's made unbelievable contributions in a whole number of dimensions.

GIPSON: What is it about Legal Services that keeps you attracted to it, keeps you with us?
ARANGO: I mean, certainly one is that it's effective. I mean, I've said in a number of contexts that -- I mean, I often like to puzzle about what -- why is it that, for example, when the survey was done in 1981 of the American public's attitude towards Legal Services, 75 percent of the public supported it? I mean, what is it about Legal Services that people like? And my sense is that it's -- they like it because it's effective. And they know that, looking out at all these government agencies that are supposed to be helping the people, that one of the few that really helps is Legal Services. And that's certainly one of the reasons that I stick with Legal Services is because my sense is -- I mean, it truly helps the clients. And I now have had experience with many other kinds of organizations and know from personal experience that there's lots of organizations out there that really don't help, the welfare system being a classic example of something that was set up to help and doesn't help. And so that's one of the things that keeps me. And the other thing I think is that Legal Services is full of interesting puzzles and trying to figure out how to make the organization work more effectively or how to figure out how to exploit the resources that are in Legal Services in a way that will make them even more helpful. Those are all challenges that are worth pursuing.

GIPSON: What is the sense of purpose or the larger broader vision that you have within which then Legal Services fits? And would you share that with us?

ARANGO: Oh, I'm not sure I think that broadly. I mean, my -- I was clearly influenced very early in my sort of adulthood by the whole community organization, community development movement. And the person that I worked with in Peace Corps training was a man named Richard Poston, who wrote a series of books that had the word "democracy" in their titles, like Democracy Is You, which was a handbook for sort of community development organizations. And somehow very early in that process, I just became convinced that the people could be trusted, which I've since realized is not really a very common attitude in the United States. But I still believe it. And I certainly think that Legal Services is an organization which makes it possible for the people to do what they want to do. And again, there aren't -- there are -- most organizations, most government agencies have a tendency to limit people's freedom and people's ability to participate in processes and cut them off from -- I mean, they essentially say in order to participate in our program, you're going to have to give up these freedoms. Now, obviously
Legal Services has broken through many of those barriers, but -- I mean, it's one of the few organizations that increases the capacity for democracy in our country rather than diminishes it. And I think in that sense, it fits into some kind of broader vision that I have. But to a certain extent, I've given up trying to plan for the whole society. I mean, I've actually given up planning as a -- I mean, the sort of notion that you can project into the future what it is that you want to do. I have a feeling, at least in an organized way, I don't think that that's a valid idea anymore. But the idea that you can let loose on society effective institutions that will position themselves to build on opportunities, I think, now, that's an idea that probably will work. And clearly that's something that Legal Services can do, its incredible flexibility. I mean, at its best, its ability to work on a health problem or work on a community development problem or work on finding income for a person or releasing a spouse from someone who's battering her or -- I mean whatever. I mean, its great flexibility and ability to move around and to take advantage of opportunities is something that I think makes it an effective tool for moving ahead some agenda which has to do with ensuring that the people have the maximum amount of power. But that's just probably as much as I can -- as well as I can phrase my vision.

GIPSON: We've talked just a little bit about Joan. You've mentioned Alan Houseman and Victor. Are there other heroes or heroines or people who have influenced you?

ARANGO: Well –

GIPSON: That particularly stick out in your mind?

ARANGO: I mean, certainly there are people that stick out in my mind as being very effective and -- I mean, at one point, we did a -- we did an interesting thing a couple of years after this, sort of this planning meeting. We went back to the corporation and said, you know, we sort of foisted planning on Legal Service programs. And we've never done anything to try to figure out whether it really works. I mean, you're just operating on our ability to describe something that sounds rational and a few project directors coming into this meeting in Washington and said, "It worked for me," but is it working for everybody? So we said -- what we proposed to do is to go out and take a look. And what we wanted to do is we want to pick ten programs -- I think we said
ten; I forget how many we actually did -- but we want to identify a category of the most effective programs in the country, and then we want to go see them. And so what we did is we mailed out a survey to all the backup centers and all of the regional corporation offices and I think 50 project directors that Alan had identified for us as being particularly effective and asked them name us the programs that do the best job for their clients, regardless of anything, whether they do it easily or with difficulty, whether they do it in a planned way or an unplanned way. Just who's the most effective? And then we got back the results, and we compiled the list. Then we picked half the programs -- we made visits. We picked half the programs that did planning and half programs that either had not done planning or were violently opposed to it. And in the process, we just -- we visited some really good programs -- I mean certainly Nashville with Ashley Wilshire was -- I mean, when we visited that, we said this is unbelievable. And we had earlier had contact with Greg Dallaire. There were some programs on the list that we never got to see such as LAF and Chicago and others that I really don't know. But certainly -- I mean, I could make a fairly long list of project directors who I think, through thick and thin, have always done exceptional work, with Ashley being one, Greg Dallaire and then Ada Shen-Jaffe as his successor. I mean, that was almost an unparalleled example of a transition that worked. And then -- I mean, people that have received much less publicity. I mean someone like, say, Jim Bamberger who went into Spokane under a program that really didn't amount to much. I mean, it was an okay Legal Service program, but didn't amount to much. And in a couple of years, turned it around in a way that really increased its effectiveness. I mean, you have to have admiration for the project directors who are sort of unsung heroes in the sense that they've gone into places. They've never called much attention to themselves. They've never been particularly active on the national level. But when you go out and see the kinds of changes they've actually been able to pull off, I mean, you say, wow, this is really impressive. And then many of the other people that I'm sure have been interviewed. Jon Asher. I mean, Asher made a very important contribution to the whole planning effort that I think probably has gone undocumented, which was -- I mean, we could lay out the planning, and we could say that first you make your plan, and then you allocate your resources, but there was a missing piece, which was then how do you manage the legal work in order to achieve the result that you wanted to fill in. And it was Jon Asher who packaged the first sort of consistent point of view about how you managed legal work in order to achieve a predefined objective. And he was the one that, as far as I can remember, was the first one to
introduce the concept of an intake system which did not make an instant decision about whether a client would be accepted or not, but instead gathered information about the client, which was then taken to a conference of the advocates where you went through case by case and decided whether this particular case fit your plan and whether you would take it or not take it. And that was an in -- I mean, he filled in the missing piece for the whole idea of planned legal services by inventing the techniques for managing legal work which made it possible for programs to in fact apply a plan to the day-to-day administration of legal services. So I mean, he's clearly one of my heroes because he did something which was then unavailable. And certainly a lot of people in the regional offices. I think, you know, Victor in his work in -- well, actually, I had seen Victor in a number of roles. At one point, I had a fair amount of contact with Victor when he was fulfilling a very strange but important role in Legal Services, which was that when the corporation identified a program where they really needed a fast change in the directorship, they would arrange for the board to fire the director or for the director to leave, and then Victor would be brought in for a period of six or eight months to put the program back together again. And so I've seen him in a number of roles. He did that very effectively. He did a marvelous job of managing the Atlanta regional office, again during the end of the expansion period and then through retrenchment. And then he's since done a spectacular job in terms of how he's managed Legal Services in northern California. I would say certainly you are someone that I admire a great deal for what you did at Tennessee in terms of establishing standards for what should be done in a state support center and then demonstrating that not only could you tell people what to do, but you could go into a program and do it, which again is not an easy kind of transition to make. So there's many, many people that I've admired in the sense of being able to take a very abstract concept such as, you know, providing legal assistance -- providing access to the justice system and translate it into, you know, something that works on a day-to-day level and have followed that idea -- have retained their commitment to this idea through thick and thin, through getting bigger, through getting smaller, through being supported and told they were doing a good job, to being targets of a corporation that, because they were doing a good job, wanted to get rid of them. I mean, through that whole thing. And you know, now sort of going through a period that I think is sort of politically depressing, but nevertheless have, through that whole period, maintained their advocate's commitment to this idea of providing access and truly helping poor people.
GIPSON: Unfortunately we're getting close to the end of our tape. Is there anything else that you wish to add to this historical document? Observations from your perspective of looking at Legal Services?

ARANGO: Well, one of the things I'm interested in and may write an article about soon is to go all the way back to the beginning; that is, to what extent is Legal Services still an antipoverty program? And how does the ideas that were developed very early and that are laid out very clearly in Earl Johnson's book continue to influence us? And I'm not prepared to talk about that at this point, but clearly Head Start and Job Corps and Legal Services as the survivors of the very early effort to do something about poverty in the United States -- I mean, there's something in that that's really worth thinking about. And it's still, I think, a very important part of the intellectual core of what Legal Services is all about. And I think it's very important for us to remember that that's still there, and it's still a very driving force. A lot of the people in Legal Services now just have no concept of what that was all about. I think one of my functions may be to sort of remind them of all that and say you ought to read Earl's book because it is very important; not only the first half, which is what everybody reads -- that's the half that describes the early days of Legal Services and is full of interesting ideas -- but the second half, which tries to measure the economic impact of Legal Services on people in poverty and what happened as a result of the changes in the welfare system caused by a lawsuit. I mean, how much more money that made available to poor people. And I mean, all of that stuff, I think, is useful to go back and read and take a look at. So I can see continuity from the very earliest days of antipoverty all the way through to now and am now sort of recently interested in fooling around in that area and seeing if that -- we might be able to reenergize some people around the concept that we have always been an antipoverty program. We still are. And there are still some juices to be extracted from that particular concept or core of ideas.

GIPSON: Will we or should we ever go back to neighborhood offices?

ARANGO: Oh, I think -- my sense is yes. If I had the money -- I mean, if Legal Services had the money, I would say the neighborhood law office was a good idea. It was never really tried. I mean, in 99 percent of the communities that had neighborhood offices, it never was implemented the way the original article in the Yale Law Review laid it out. That concept is still valid and
worth trying. I'd also say that probably the original Legal Services offices that handled misdemeanors as well as civil legal services were probably a better concept. I once had a Legal Service director tell me that it was the clients that they dealt with on misdemeanors who told them what was really going on in the community and that once they lost the ability to handle misdemeanors and once misdemeanors were passed on to the public defender or something else, that that really severed one of the best links to information about the community because it was the guys out on the street who were being picked up for the misdemeanors who really knew what was going on. And it was the interaction between their lawyers and those people that gave Legal Services its best insights into how the community was really structured and what was really happening. I think there was some real wisdom in that. And I probably would go back to say we'll handle -- and actually it's being tried right now in Harlem. We'll handle all the minor crimes in the community in order to establish links into that as well as all the civil problems out of our storefront offices. And we will aim for truly trying to establish that this is the community's law office. And we will make an effort at the original idea, which was -- I mean, the concept was the lawyer stepping out of his neighborhood office, walking up and down the street, saying hi to folks. Having the dialogue about what's going on, attending the community meetings, knowing how well the school was really working because he or she was seeing, face to face, the kids every day. I mean, that kind of thing, I think is still a very valid concept that is worth trying. We never tried it before, we may never have the money to do it again, but if I had the money, I'd do it.

GIPSON: Well, John, I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule. It is always a pleasure to talk to you. Thank you very much. And this is the end of the tape.

ARANGO: Thanks. (Conclusion of interview.)