

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF CEDAR RAPIDS  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Juan Cortez

Conducted by Carolyn Wellso  
June 23, 1985  
1022 Eleventh Avenue SE  
Cedar Rapids, Iowa  
Transcribed by Sue Daugherty

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Mr. Cortez was born in 1917 in Texas and moved with his parents and siblings to Cedar Rapids in 1918. His father is of Mexican descent. From this interview we learn about the Oak Hill and Time Check areas of Cedar Rapids and something of what minority life was about, especially that of the black minority. We also learn about early radio, entertainment and transportation in Cedar Rapids.

till after World War II.

CW: Talk about what the Oak Hill Jackson life was like, community house, teachers. Cedar Rapids was a city of--I don't how large it was in . . .

Cortez: It was about 30,000.

CW: City of about 30,000. You went to Tyler school. What was Tyler school like? Were there different people in your class that went on to some local other name? Who were some of the influential teachers or principals . . .you know, things that . . . Were there any students at Tyler that went on to any fame? Were there some outstanding teachers? What was Tyler like? After the War were there Greek immigrants? What were the nationality groups that lived in the area? [tape muddled]

Cortez: This Oak Hill area is an area some people have a kind of a misconception of the make up of Cedar Rapids. Cedar Rapids got its early start in this southeast side--Oak Hill area. Because mostly people that worked at the packing house. Also along Twelfth Avenue just beside of the packing house (that used to be Sinclair Packing House) there was also a cannery factory right on Twelfth Avenue. So farmers had a lot of vegetables were brought into Cedar Rapids to be canned. That is the present are where the Iowa Steel Works right on Twelfth Avenue between the railroad tracks on Fourth Street up to Fifth and Sixth Street.

CW: Where the Czech community. . .

Cortez: . . .and the Czech community was scattered all through that side and the west side across Fourteenth Avenue to what--the east

# LaRouche candidate claims labor 'smear'

By Dale Kueter

Gazette staff writer

Juan Cortez of Cedar Rapids, longtime Democrat and union supporter who is a Lyndon LaRouche candidate for the Democratic nomination for U.S. Senate in Iowa, says organized labor is trying to destroy his candidacy.

The matter came to a head this week when the AFL-CIO News, the official weekly newspaper of the national AFL-CIO, said Cortez' "status as a candidate is not certain."

The newspaper provided a run-down of LaRouche candidates in 13 states. "In a 14th state, Iowa," the paper said, "the candidate claimed by LaRouche — Juan Cortez — contends he was unaware of the way-out policies of LaRouche when he agreed to seek nomination."

Cortez said he made no such statement to the AFL-CIO News. "The outrageous lie about my candidacy being in question originated in a libelous article in the New York Times," Cortez continued. He then went on to call the Times a "mouthpiece of Wall Street and Paul Volcker," who is chairman of the Federal Reserve Board.

Cortez, 69, has been actively involved in union matters since 1948. He is a former American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees local official, former member of the Hawkeye Labor Council in Cedar Rapids, and currently is a member of the Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission.

"The real reason that the AFL-CIO is afraid to list my name with the other LaRouche-affiliated candidates is because it would be an admission that rank and file leaders in the AFL-CIO do support LaRouche policies, and are capable of leading this nation out of the depression that Lane Kirkland and Paul Volcker have gotten us into."

Kirkland is AFL-CIO president. Volcker has been a favorite target of Cortez and other LaRouche candidates, mainly being blamed for high interest rates of the past.

Cortez said state and local AFL-CIO organizations have also "embarked on a coordinated, illegal campaign to destroy Democratic



**Juan Cortez**  
Seeks Senate seat

candidates" who are associated with LaRouche.

He said a walkout by some persons at the Polk County Democratic convention April 5 was led by state AFL-CIO leaders.

Cortez said he called Murray Seeger Wednesday afternoon to discuss the AFL-CIO News article. Seeger is the paper's director of information.

"He was trying to get me to say I knew everything about Lyndon LaRouche," Cortez related. "I told Seeger that I supported LaRouche policies, particularly the war on drug dealing, matters dealing with economic conditions and the farm crisis."

Cortez said he doesn't know about LaRouche claims that most people regard as "far-out," such as allegations that the queen of England is involved in drug trafficking.

He said there are some things no one mentions about LaRouche, "such as he was the first to make mention of the need to do something about the famine in Ethiopia."

The AFL-CIO News devoted nearly a full issue recently to what it calls "the LaRouche cult." It has warned other Democrats not to assume that the Illinois primary victory by several LaRouche candidates couldn't happen somewhere else.

4-24-1986



# Cortez: Black influence in Catholic Church to increase

By Nancy Stevens

Gazette staff writer

A Cedar Rapids man was among more than 1,500 black Roman Catholics who gathered at Catholic University, Washington, D.C., last week for the first Black Catholic Congress in almost a century.

The last such meeting occurred in 1894, said Juan Cortez, who represented the Dubuque Archdiocese along with six persons from Waterloo and Stephan Brown of Divine Word Seminary, Epworth.

Cortez, 1022 11th Ave. SE, is a lay lector at St. Wenceslaus church. There are 11 black Catholic bishops in the United States, and all attended the conference, Cortez said. "I felt it was an extraordinary personal experience to be elected to attend and participate, to have the opportunity to meet and hear all 11 black bishops and also to hear Cardinal O'Connor from New York.

"It was enlightening and will give me more encouragement to assist other black Catholics in our community who are not regular church-



Juan Cortez

going Catholics because of being such a small minority in mostly white parishes."

Cortez said it took almost 100

years to call a second congress of black Catholics because it took that long for blacks to rise to positions of power in the church.

Cortez hopes the meeting will spark the revival of religious publications directed at blacks. "I've been receiving publications published 10 or 15 years ago that were discontinued because of lack of funds. I feel now they have support."

Although there are only 14 black Catholic families listed on church records in Cedar Rapids, Cortez said there are more who do not attend church regularly. There are 1.3 million black Catholics nationwide.

Cortez predicted that black influence in the Catholic Church will increase in the future and that more black sons and daughters will be encouraged to choose vocations in the church.

One purpose of the Washington meeting was to draw up resolutions related to black participation in the Catholic Church. Delegates ap-

proved resolutions calling for the following:

- Encouragement of black men and women to choose the priesthood and sisterhood.
- Support of Catholic choirs in black communities and development of leadership among black lay Catholics.
- Expansion of special ministries to young people and families.
- Wider acceptance of Afro American music and artistic expression in Catholic worship.
- Renewed commitment to identify with the poor and oppressed and to move toward justice and equality.
- Establishment of a black Catholic archives and lending library that would identify black priests, sisters and saints and would include materials reflecting black life in the religious experience.

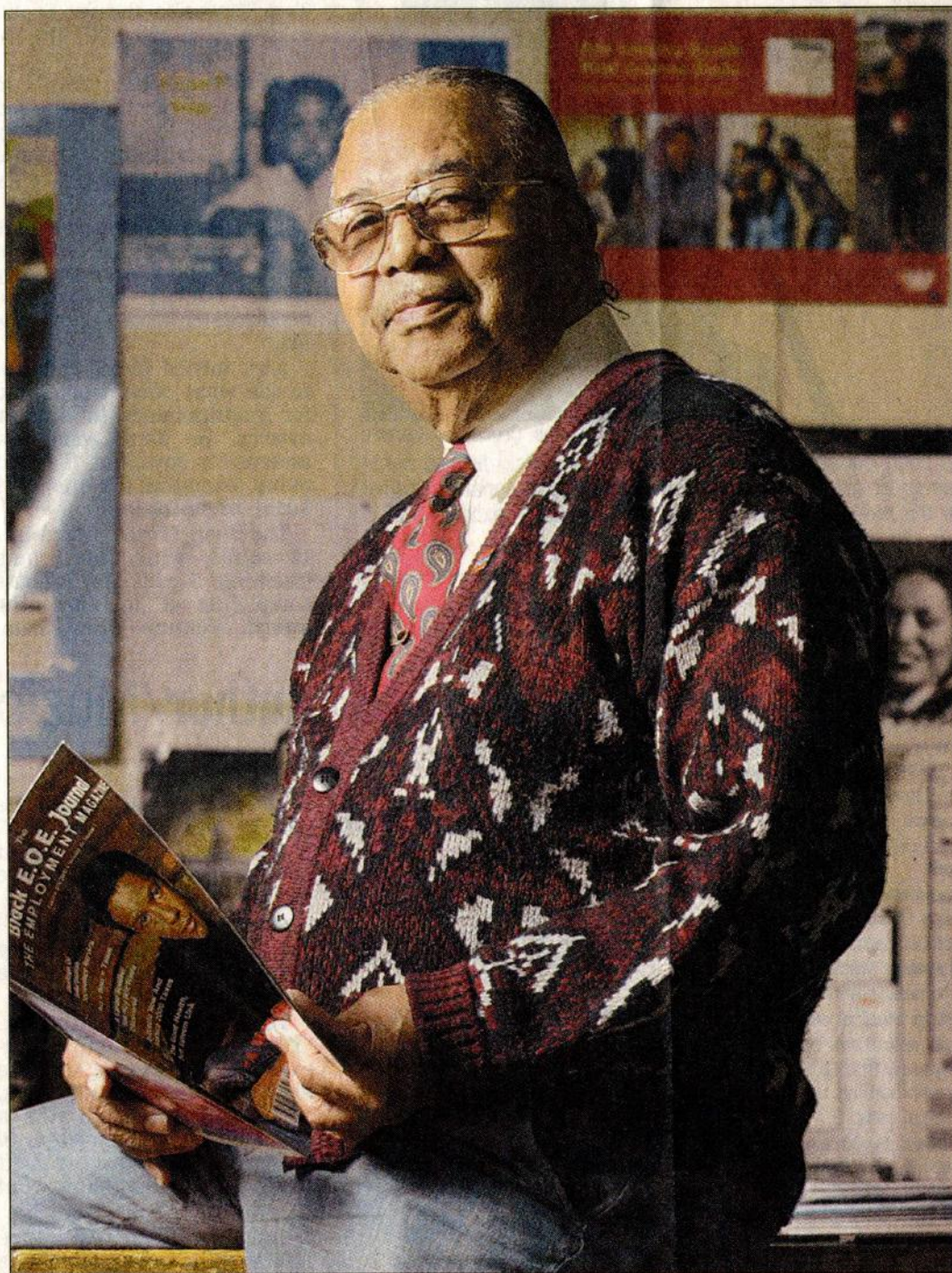
It won't take another century for black Catholics to gather again. Cortez said another conference is being planned for next year.

Junior League of Cedar Rapids  
Oral History Project

Interview with: Juan Cortez  
Conducted by: Carolyn Wellso  
Date: June 23, 1985  
Place: 1022 11th Avenue SE Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Cortez: Thank you, Carolyn. I am Juan Cortez, as she said, and I've lived in Cedar Rapids. Going back to when we arrived first in Cedar Rapids, 1918--I don't really remember what particular month--presumably it was summertime because there were four children that came. I was the baby at eighteen months old. Even though the birth records show or indicate that--by error--that I was born at 1115 Twelfth Avenue SE, that was our residence. So that's how long we've been here. I'm 68 years old now, at least 68, this particular July 8. Born 1917 in Texas on a farm. My mother and father decided after two half brothers had come to Cedar Rapids when they were 16 or 17 years old--that was during the time that employment was just beginning to increase in the Cedar Rapids area after World War I--leaving Texas because there was hardly any employment and we were in a farm area and my half brothers, one had a job at Quaker Oats and one had a job at what was then Sinclair Packing House. So the one brother that had the job at Quaker Oats decided he had an opportunity to work on the Hiawatha Railroad going to Minnesota. He took that job and told my father if he came to Cedar Rapids that he would be able to get him a job at Quaker Oats. So he was employed at Quaker Oats and he remained on that job for 45 years





The Gazette

A new Boy Scout diversity award has been named in honor of the late community activist Juan Cortez of Cedar Rapids, who died in October 2000. David Airy of Hiawatha developed the Juan Cortez Heritage Award, which focuses on African-American history and can be earned by Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts and Venture Crew members. Airy hopes the award will not only be made available to the Scouts of the Hawkeye Area Council but that Scouts from around the country will discover the award and begin working to earn it.



# Scout's honor

## Heritage Award celebrates diversity, late longtime activist Juan Cortez

By Suzanne Barnes

The Gazette

HIAWATHA — David Airy was interested in being

the best Boy Scout leader he could be.

Consequently, he enrolled in an advanced adult leadership training course called Wood Badge.

Originally designed by Lord Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of Scouting, the course involved spending

two full weekends at Scout camp and completing five projects or tickets. The men who completed the first Wood Badge course were presented with wooden beads from an African necklace, which inspired its name, said Airy, 42, of Hiawatha.

During the training course, Airy learned the five projects he was to complete should help his unit, the community or the Scout council. One of the projects, he was told,



**David Airy**  
Boy Scout leader



This is the Juan Cortez Heritage Award older Scouts can earn. Cub Scouts can earn a similar award that includes their symbol. The awards will be dedicated at 2 p.m. Saturday at the African American Historical Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa in Cedar Rapids.

### Event

■ **What:** Juan Cortez Heritage Award Dedication and Open House

■ **Where:** African American Historical Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa, 55 12th Ave. SE, (319) 862-2101

■ **When:** Saturday; open house 1 to 3 p.m.; award dedication, 2 p.m.

■ **Discounted admission:** \$1 for Cubs, Scouts and Venture Crew; \$2 for all adults

### Scouting, community activities cited in selecting award namesake

The Gazette

CEDAR RAPIDS — The Juan Cortez Heritage Award was named after the late Cedar Rapids community leader for several reasons.

He was active in community state organizations, including the Jane Boyd Community House, the Cedar Rapids chapter of the NAACP and the Iowa Foster Care Review Board. He also served as a liaison for the Black Committee for Youth with Problems.

However, his name was selected for the new Scout badge because he also had a connection with Boy Scouts. From

1962 to 1972, he served as a Boy Scout leader. In 1973, he was awarded the Silver Beaver, the highest honor for an adult leader.

Jamie Toennies, director of development at the African American Historical Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa, read this comment from the nomination form for his Silver Beaver award: "Juan's role in Scouting as well as in the community is to strengthen the ties between black and white."

"That's why he was chosen," Toennies said, "because of his work with the community and diversity."

should focus on diversity.

"You got to define what diversity was and develop the project from there," Airy said.

He was aware of the Afri-

can American Historical Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa in Cedar Rapids, but he didn't think Scouts

► **AWARD, PAGE 2D**

ALINUWOC



uan Cortez isn't slowing down. At 83, he still shows pep in his step and a passion for issues.

He'll even notarize your important documents. He's been a notary for 32 years.

"What I haven't done is retire," Cortez says.

The Cedar Rapids native

## SERVICE

continues to work beyond his 1985 retirement as chief bailiff in the Linn County District Court.

Currently, Cortez is employed with the U.S. Census Bureau's Cedar Rapids office.

He's also a member of the Oak Hill/Jackson Neighborhood Council and the Iowa Foster Care Review Board. He participates in several city and county committees.

However, Cortez's main activity is the NAACP, where he serves as branch secretary for the Cedar Rapids chapter and first vice president for the Iowa-Nebraska conference. He recently received the NAACP's annual Martin Luther King Award for his long involvement.

Because he was making a speech in Marshalltown, Cortez wasn't on hand to hear the praise for his long involvement with the

*"We had quite a bit of enthusiasm (in the past). Generations change and concerns change. Some are inquisitive, some are responsive and some are nonchalant."*

NAACP at local, state and national levels.

Cortez says his goal is to listen to people's concerns and problems. That comes naturally to him, something his mother instilled in him as a child.

"When you're helping someone, you're helping yourself," he says.

**SOMETIMES, HELPING** others is a difficult task. He says times are changing, and with it, people's attitudes.

"We had quite a bit of enthusiasm (in the past)," Cortez says. "Generations change and concerns change. Some people are inquisitive, some are responsive and some are nonchalant."

He puts the Cedar Rapids community in the "nonchalant"

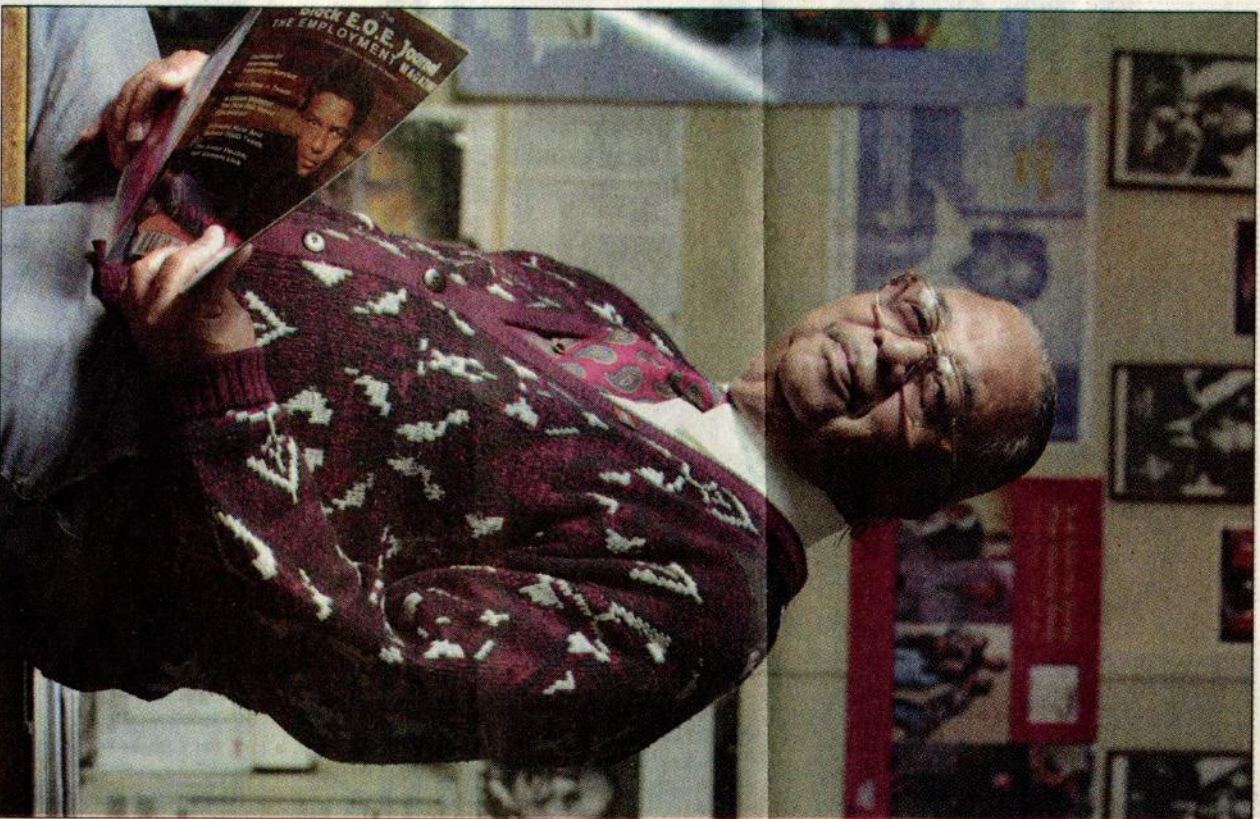
category, not caring about important social issues they did 20 years ago.

As a result, those who were once involved with NAACP have dropped out, those the civil rights organization have been return the favor. Because of lack of involvement, few role models to mentor who in turn are not about excelling in social says.

That's why Cortez active.

"I'm flexible in what I do and as long as the people to help people," he says someone comes along with people, then I might

**Story by Kristophere O. Gazette staff writer/Photo by F. Martin**



Juan Cortez, 83, has long been active in the NAACP at local, state and national levels. He is concerned because he doesn't think Cedar Rapids residents care as much about social issues as they did 20 years ago. Attitudes have changed, he says.

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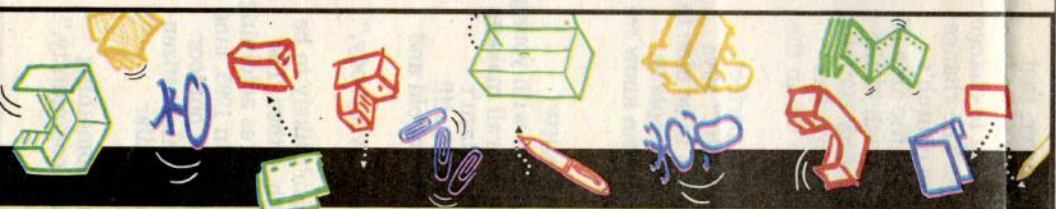
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# NAACP activist Cortez, 83, dies

10-26-2000  
By Dave Gosch

Gazette staff writer

CEDAR RAPIDS — Juan Cortez wore many hats during his life, but perhaps his greatest passion was working for the Cedar Rapids Chapter of the NAACP.

Cortez, 83, who died Tuesday night of an inflamed pancreas and kidney failure, sometimes spent 12 to 14 hours at the NAACP office, according to his friend, Slayton Thompson.

"His heart and soul was the NAACP," said Thompson. "That's where he pooled all of his time and energy."

Even in his 80s, Cortez had not slowed down.

A March story in The Gazette said Cortez was employed with the U.S.

Census Bureau's Cedar Rapids office.

Cortez, of 1022 11th Ave. SE, was also a member of the Oak Hill/Jackson Neighborhood Council and the Iowa Foster Care Review Board. He participated in several city and county committees.

He was first vice president for the NAACP's Iowa-Nebraska conference. He recently received the NAACP's annual Martin Luther King Award for his long involvement.

"I think his main interest was helping people in need," according to



**Juan Cortez**

Part of many  
city and county  
committees

his son, Juan Jose Cortez, of Orchard Park, N.Y. "It was not just limited to African-Americans or Hispanics. He helped everyone. That's why he was so loved by everyone in the state."

Former Cedar Rapids NAACP President Linda Topinka described Cortez as "the backbone of the NAACP."

"If a new person came to town and they went to the NAACP office, they could always expect direction. He was always trying to network and get people involved," said Topinka. "He was a very warm, compassionate person."

Cortez was a World War II veteran and was also a member of St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church, where he was

■ Turn to 3B: **Cortez**

active in the parish.

Cortez was a retired postal worker before becoming a bailiff. He retired as chief bailiff for the Linn County District Court in 1982.

Cortez also ran unsuccessfully for the Iowa Legislature in 1980 and 1982.

Linn County Auditor Linda Langenberg said Cortez was a precinct official for many years.

In fact, Cortez was scheduled to work the Nov. 7 election at the Options of Linn County polling place.

"We're going to miss him a

### **Visitation will be held from 3 to 9 p.m. Friday at Murdoch-Linnwood Funeral Home.**

lot. He's always been very involved and worked hard for us at the precincts," said Langenberg.

In the March Gazette story, Cortez explained his philosophy behind getting involved in the community.

Cortez said his goal is to listen to people's concerns and problems. That came naturally to him, something his mother

instilled in him as a child.

"When you're helping someone, you're helping yourself," he said.

Visitation will be held from 3 to 9 p.m. Friday at Murdoch-Linnwood Funeral Home, 520 Wilson Ave. SW. The funeral service will be held at 10:30 a.m. Saturday at St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church, 510 16th Ave. SE.



# LINN COUNTY

## Oak Hill area residents act to stem vanda

By Mark Glenn  
Gazette staff writer

Neighbors in Cedar Rapids' Oak Hill area have been victimized by vandalism and petty theft for the past several months. Now they've started to fight back.

For a while, neighbors called police when they had problems with a group of about a dozen juveniles who began hanging around the 1000 block of 11th Avenue SE, several blocks from Mercy Hospital.

The youths causing the problems range in age from early to late teens.

Victims apparently have been chosen at random and there is no pattern to the incidents. Neighbors say it will be quiet on the street for two weeks, then windows will be broken out two nights in a row.

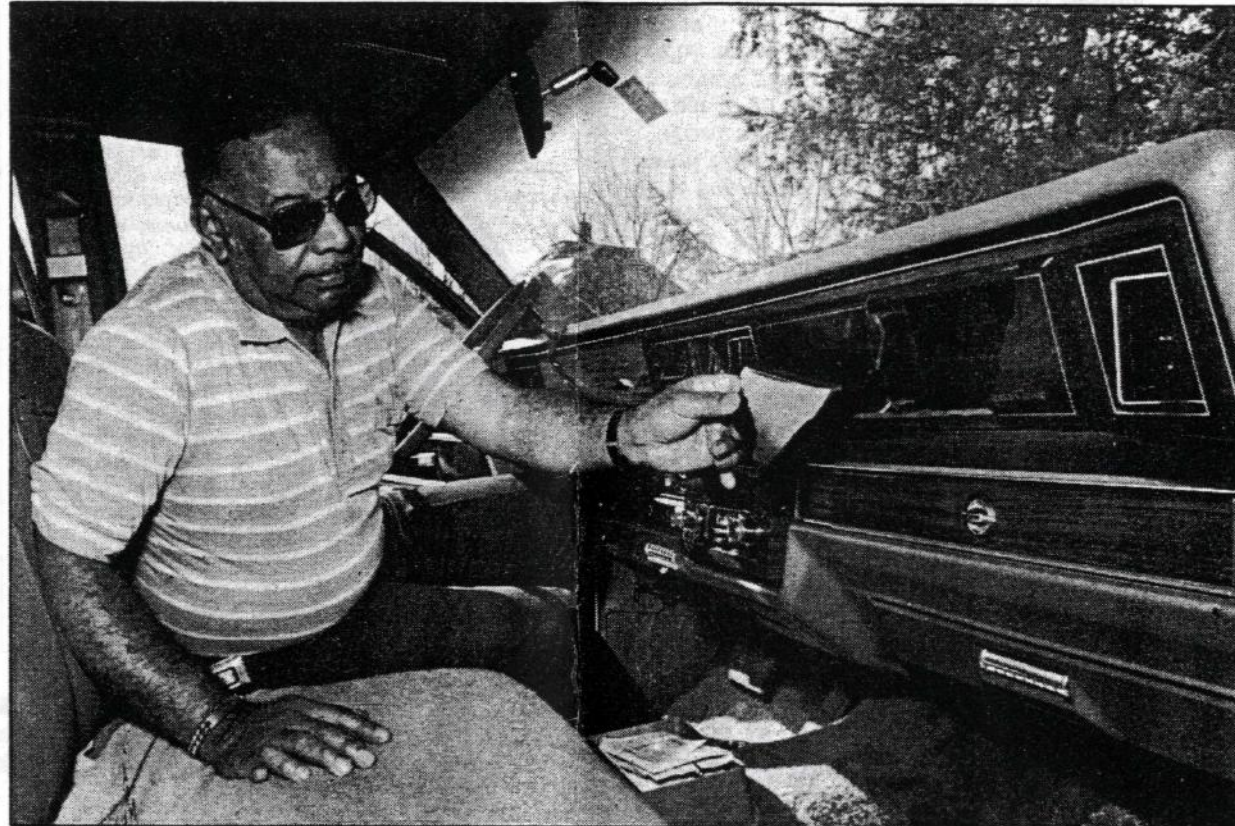
"Individually, it's a lot of petty, trivial things," said Carole Schmidt, whose family has lived in a house at 1032 11th Ave. SE for 11 years. But when those things are added up, they have become a big problem for those living in the area, she said.

**AFTER SEVERAL** months of telephoning police whenever there was a problem, it got to the point that police no longer came when an act of vandalism was reported to them, said one neighbor. Or if police came out, residents were told that filing charges would do little good because the offenders were juveniles.

But after the youths broke windows out of two cars in mid-February, spray-painted another car and egged a house, breaking out two windows, neighbors decided it was time to act.

They arranged to meet with Police Chief Gary Hinzman and Public Safety Commissioner Floyd Bergen to discuss their problems. They have taken steps to form a Neighborhood Watch Program and petitioned the City Council, asking that a street light be installed on their block.

The meeting with police officials produced some positive results, neighbors say, including charges against three juveniles in connection with two windows that were broken out of one house. Terry Osterhaus,



Juan Cortez, 1022 11th Ave. SE, handles a piece of dashboard smashed when vandals broke into his car, causing about \$2,000 damage. Cortez is one of a number of residents in the Oak Hill area victimized by a rash of vandalism that neighbors blame on a group of neighborhood youths. In an effort to fight back, residents have contacted top police officials and are forming a Neighborhood Watch group.

who has lived in a house at 1028 11th Ave. SE for 1½ years, said just going to the meeting and knowing that someone in authority finally was aware of their problems made residents feel better. "I felt like I was doing something about it," she said.

After "horrid words" were spray-painted on the windows of Osterhaus' car, she refused to drive it for

two days until she could scrape the paint off with a razor blade. "I didn't like going around with a car with bad words written all over it," she said. "It made me very uncomfortable."

And before that, windows were broken out of her house.

However, since the meeting earlier this month, said

Osterhaus, 32, the neighbor. She said she even saw a squad recently, something that hadn't happened since the meeting with police.

Hinzman said increasing the area is only one step in helping with crime problems. He referred to the Bureau and arranged for a Neighborhood Watch.

Hinzman said the kinds of problems in the area are similar to those reported by southwest-side residents, except the time is not as large.

Another neighbor, Lena Berry, 32, SE, was very satisfied with the meeting. After she watched three youths break two windows out of her car, she reported the incident happened.

During the meeting with police, Schmidt described watching the three youths break windows on the house when she rapped on the door. They were charged in connection with the meeting.

**BERRY SAID** she only watched the windows and to have the boys break the side of her house. She had a razor blade to scrape dried paint off the front porch from an earlier incident.

Schmidt was not so sure the meeting would reduce the amount of crime in the area. Neighborhood Watch organizers said residents were staying up late to watch their front porches to try to prevent incidents.

And if vandalism was so bad, she said, months, when the youths causing problems outside only so long, she said. She looked forward to the rest of the year.

Osterhaus echoed that concern. "I don't know if summer," she said.

Gazette photo by L.W. Ward



# IOWANS TODAY

# Cortez: Respect for others is essen

*Editor's note: Today's Close-Up subject is Juan Cortez, 78, of 1022 11th Ave. SE, retired from the post office and as chief court bailiff for Linn County 6th Judicial District; organizer of the Oak Hill-Jackson Neighborhood Association; founder of Oak Hill Information Center and the Community Resource Center for Minorities.*

**What do you like most, least, about your occupation?**

Most: Listening and learning about people within the community and being able to use my resources and skills in assisting them. It is very rewarding when I get to see the end results of situations I was able to be involved in. Least: The amount of time in the day (in which) to be available.

**If you could visit with any five people from throughout history, who would they be?**

Don Quixote, because of his personality, his romantic and personable attitude. Harry Truman, because of his ability to tell it like it is. Poncho Villa, during his reign in Mexico, to learn why my father's family left Mexico. Last: Marco Polo and Christopher Columbus, for a clear knowledge and understanding of that time period.

**What's good and bad about living in Cedar Rapids?**

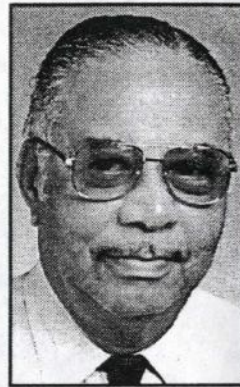
Good: Being a part of the growth and changes. (Also good) is the high level of education that I and others have received; that's why my kids have been successful. Bad: I can't really make a negative remark because of how much Cedar

## CLOSE-UP

■ **Education:** Graduated from former McKinley Senior High School. Took short courses from University of Oklahoma, Norman, Okla.; University of Iowa; and Kirkwood Community College.

■ **Hometown:** Born in Houston, moved to Cedar Rapids as infant.

■ **Family:** Widower of Dolores Cortez. Children: Juan Jr., 50, Orchard Park, N.Y., instructor at three community colleges, owner of computer science business; Daniel, 46, Richton Park, Ill., computer consultant for Montgomery Ward & Co.; Tony, 44, Cedar Rapids, department manager for Hy-Vee on 32nd Street NE; Marineta, 41, Richton Park, Ill., employed by a senior citizens center; and Lileta, 39, University Park, Ill., city clerk. Fourteen grandchildren.



Rapids has made possible for me during my childhood and up to the present. Bad is a state of mind.

**What is your goal in life?**

At 78, my goal in life is to enhance community unity.

**What is the best book you ever read?**

This is funny. The "Book of Etiquette." I have an old copy that was printed some years ago, and I feel everyone should have one in their home, office, schools, colleges to help make our city and country a better place so we can respect each other.

**If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?**

Brazil, South America, Trinidad and Grenada. I've read so much about South America that I would like to go there. Brazil is a fascinating country. I was in Trinidad and Grenada during World War II.

**What is your favorite meal?**

Chili. My mother made good chili, and my wife made excellent chili. My mother and father had a little pop and ice cream store, the Lili Cortez Sweet Shop, and she made chili and hot tamales.

**What are your leisure interests?**

Just to go for a walk with a friend in the park, or have a picnic with the family.

**The most important thing you've learned in life is . . .**

To respect everyone and you will receive respect in return. Live and let live — mind your own business and not dig into other people's personal business.

**What's your idea of a great time?**

When you can be with someone, relaxing, conversing and sharing ideas and plans.

**Do you have a pet peeve?**

Being with someone who is of their food, and (having to) let that person know it is v

**What did you want to be in high school?**

A good long-distance runner. Gloves boxer. But my physical the best, due to the Depression (when there were little) vitan

**The first thing you noticed**

... Their personality and speed. **Exclusive of the present, your favorite time in history**

I would like to answer that history. It would be my elementary. I believe every school child should have a pleasant experience during their pleasant experience during their maintain a pleasant personal

**What was your most embarrassing**

I was waiting in a group of Louis airport. A young woman approached us and said to me you when we were flying over to the person next to me, "I was talking to?" Then she came up a big hug and kiss. It turned friend whom I hadn't seen in change your hair styles and weight, and I didn't recognize truly embarrassing.



# NAACP offers many forms of help

**A**s branch secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Cedar Rapids, I feel it is important to let members and friends know some of the programs we are involved in for everyone's benefit.

Our local files are filled with Legal Redress Committee complaints, so I will not dwell on this local program.

Our national Labor and Industry Division Program, since its founding in 1909, has been concerned about the dignity of black workers and their right to equal access to employment. The Labor and Industry Division was established in 1949 by Walter White, executive director of the NAACP. Working to eliminate discriminatory employment practices in the private and public employment sectors, the division also promotes community-based job fairs, local branch labor and industry committees; implements job readiness programs; conducts studies on and promotes affirmative action and equal employment opportunity programs; and promotes establishment of local job banks. The

## GUEST COLUMN



**Juan Cortez**

division also promotes coordination and cooperation between the NAACP and organized labor.

For over 80 years, the NAACP has promoted educational excellence among African-Americans and other minorities. We also reaffirm the historic commitment of the NAACP to the elimination of racial segregation and discrimination in all forms of public education. We direct our branches, youth councils and college chapters to use every legal and/or educational means to accelerate the rate of school desegregation and improve the quality of youth education.

ACT-SO stands for Afro-academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics. This year-long local enrichment program is designed to recruit, stimulate, improve and encourage high academic and cultural achievement among African-American high school students. In ACT-SO, community volunteers and business leaders serve as mentors and coaches to promote academic and artistic excellence among African-American students. There are 24 categories of competition in the sciences, humanities, performing and visual arts.

It is open to African-American high school students who are citizens of the United States, enrolled in grades 9 through 12 and are amateurs in the categories of competition. Local competitions usually take place between March and May. Contestants who win gold medals on the local level qualify to attend the national ACT-SO NAACP competition, which takes place in early July at the NAACP annual

convention. Next year's convention will be held in Atlanta, Ga.

The Community Development Resource Center (CDRC), also a national program, promotes greater awareness of banking services in our communities and serves as a diagnostic tool to provide grass-roots needs assessment. In partnership with Nationsbank, NAACP developed the Community Development Resource Center in 1992. The success of the pilot program is leading to expansion in other regions served by a local NAACP chapter.

As local branch secretary and first vice president of the Iowa/Nebraska State Conference of NAACP Branches, I encourage students to participate in local NAACP programs. Help us encourage others to achieve their highest level of education. This is not stressful work, unless you allow others to impede your progress.

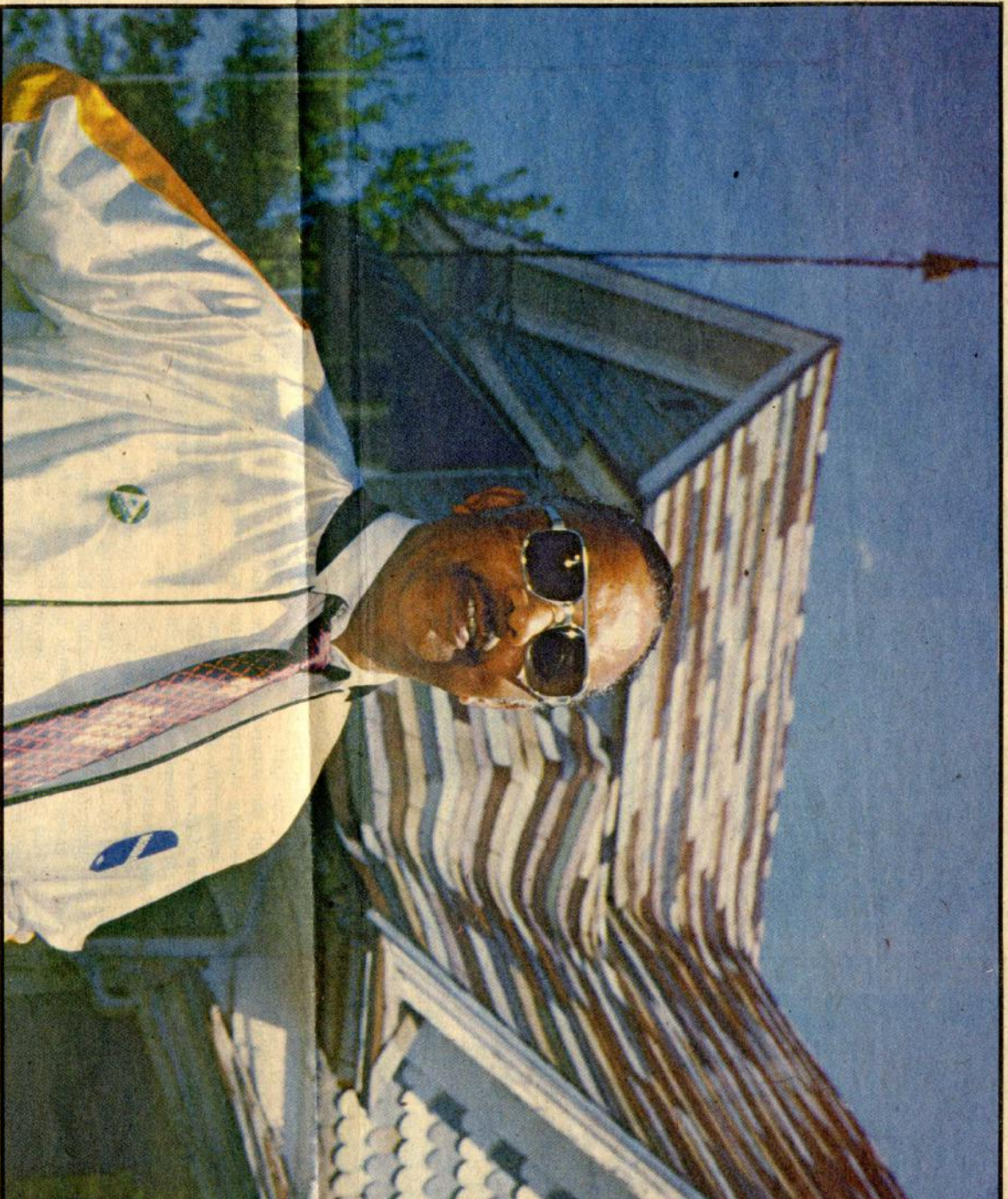
We also need adult instructors to help prepare students for the Atlanta competition next July.

Our local NAACP branch is located at 1134 Ninth St. SE, and our telephone number is (319) 365-9482. Volunteers are invited to call and assist in the development of NAACP programs. We welcome your participation in aiding our local students and members.

*Juan Cortez of Cedar Rapids is secretary and first vice president, Iowa/Nebraska State Conference, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.*

COPY IN NAACP





*Juan Cortez's roof symbolizes the changes he'd like to make in the Oak Hill neighborhood.*

# Juan Cortez

Meet a man who's trying to change the image of his neighborhood — the Oak Hill area of Cedar Rapids. His community work has won him the respect of local leaders and caught the eye of national politicians.

If you visit Juan Cortez's Southeast side neighborhood, you'll notice his house. Unlike its more staid counterparts, the roof of his home closely resembles a patchwork quilt.

"I planned it to be different," Juan admitted with a grin. "I didn't like the normal old style because it looks so drab."

The cheerful-looking roof is also somewhat symbolic of the changes 66-year-old Juan is trying to make in his neighborhood — and elsewhere. "Things need changing in the Oak Hill area. There is that old stigma of Oak Hill being a blighted area," he said.

Upgrading his neighborhood is just one of Juan's interests. He is president of the advisory board of the Hawkeye Area Community Action Program, a member of the Cedar Rapids International Festival board of directors, the Linn Community Food Bank executive board, the Hawkeye Labor Council, the United Way allocation panel for human services, the Civil Rights Commission board of directors, the Knights

of Columbus area council.

He is a retiree of the American Municipal Employees Union president of the Carriers Union Iowa Labor Pro

Juan is also an office at the Ninth St. SE, for information

When former Cedar Rapids party, "I just s Cedar Rapids, plane," he said Walter Mondala President Jim Rapids, he en birthday cake

In 1982, Juan • Please



tempt to give the residents of the Southeast side representation in the government. It was important because of the atmosphere among the community that senior citizens and low income people really have no voice and could not convey their feelings to someone from another area."

But he said that Rep. Phil Brammer, who won the 1982 election, is doing "an excellent job of representing the people."

Juan previously had run for the state legislature in 1980. His wife had died the previous year, his children were grown and "successfully employed." He explained, "I decided to keep myself busy by becoming more involved."

The inside of his home at 1022 11th Ave. SE bears mute testament to his involvement. His phone, which has a cord stretching from one end of the house to the other, interrupted a 90-minute conversation three times. Religious wall hangings are overwhelmed by awards, certificates and plaques. Every horizontal surface bears stacks and stacks of papers and folders.

Ironically, Juan almost didn't end up in Cedar Rapids. When he finished at the old Washington High School, he wanted to go to college but couldn't afford it.

"After graduating from high school, I took postgraduate courses which include physics and economics merely to buy time," he said with a slow smile. He was hoping he could buy enough time for the Depression to end and for job opportunities here to open up.

However, he and a friend ended up heading East in search of employment. Juan found it as stockman at a Woolworth's "5 and 10 cent" store in Indiana Harbor, Ind. He only got that job because he was more successful than the store manager in unclogging the drain in the flooded stockroom.

Juan worked in Indiana for two years, from 1937 to 1939, before seeking a transfer. "Because I wanted more money, I accepted a transfer to Detroit," he said. In Indiana, he was making \$7.50 a week; in Detroit, as assistant manager, his weekly salary zoomed to \$21.

He was drafted in 1941, and after 4½ years in the Army infantry and coast auxiliary anti-aircraft regiment, he returned to Detroit — where he was denied his job.

"Too many veterans were coming out," he explained. He refused to go back to being a stockman and moved to Chicago. There he worked at a Woolworth's, at a foundry that made car bumpers and at a Ford plant on the south side.

In 1948, Juan received notice from the federal government postal department that he had passed a test taken two years before.

"I decided to go with the federal government," he said, "and that was the start of my 30 years of government service." The time he spent in the Army counted toward his retirement, he said.

office building work," he explained. Plus, he didn't have to deal with rain, sleet or snow. "You could walk underground across town to any building."

However, because his parents were getting elderly, he sought a transfer to the Cedar Rapids post office. After an unsuccessful interview in 1959, he took then-safety commissioner Ralph Mikesell with him when there were openings in 1960.

"He sat in the postmaster's office during our discussion," Juan recalled. When the postmaster said he could only consider a local person, the safety commissioner interrupted.

Juan said Mikesell asked the postmaster.

The postmaster agreed to hire him and Juan worked as a letter carrier until 1968, when he was appointed hearing officer and investigator.

That position lasted until "the Republican administration came into power." Juan went back to being a letter carrier, retiring from that position in December 1975.

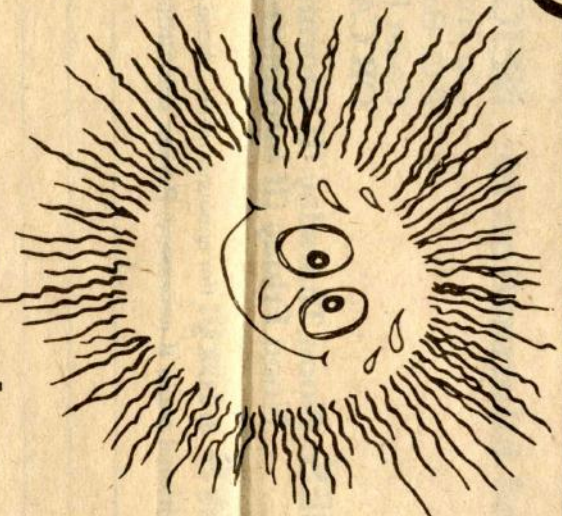
Early the next year, he was hired by then-sheriff Walter "Tiny" Grant as court bailiff and six months later he was appointed chief court bailiff by Judge Harold Victor. He retired from that position in 1982 to devote more time to volunteer work.

helping people. Juan's parents small neighborhood store — "ice cream and staples —" "Eleven" — and they were helping people.

"Low income people have a difficult time finding direct indication for their needs with from directions to the right assistance to legal representation said. He tries to fill that

Unlike their father, Cortez children aren't as their communities. However Tony Cortez of Cedar Rapids that having such a father more aware of what's before the average kid yo

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Juan Cortez's roof symbolizes the changes he'd like to make in the Oak Hill neighborhood and elsewhere.

Neighbors photo by L.W. Ward

# Juan Cortez

C.R. Gaz. 6-26-84 p. 1E

Meet a man who's trying to change the image of his neighborhood — the Oak Hill area of Cedar Rapids. His community work has won him the respect of local leaders and caught the eye of national politicians.

If you visit Juan Cortez's Southeast side neighborhood, you'll notice his house. Unlike its more staid counterparts, the roof of his home closely resembles a patchwork quilt.

"I planned it to be different," Juan admitted with a grin. "I didn't like the normal old style because it looks so drab."

The cheerful-looking roof is also somewhat symbolic of the changes 66-year-old Juan is trying to make in his neighborhood — and elsewhere. "Things need changing in the Oak Hill area. There is that old stigma of Oak Hill being a blighted area," he said.

Upgrading his neighborhood is just one of Juan's interests. He is president of the advisory board of the Hawkeye Area Community Action Program, a member of the Cedar Rapids International Festival board of directors, the Linn Community Food Bank executive board, the Hawkeye Labor Council, the United Way allocation panel for human services, the Civil Rights Commission board of directors, the Knights

of Columbus and the St. Wenceslaus parish council.

He is a retired chief court baliff, past president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Union Local 231, past vice president of the National Association of Letter Carriers Union Local 373 and a member of the Iowa Labor Press Association.

Juan is also active in area politics and maintains an office at the Oak Hill Information Center, 1138 Ninth St. SE, for "people who need notary service or informational assistance."

When former first lady Rosalynn Carter visited Cedar Rapids in 1979, Juan was in the escort party. "I just stayed with her all the way through Cedar Rapids, all the way to Davenport to the plane," he said. He also was in then-Vice President Walter Mondale's escort party in 1979. And when President Jimmy Carter's son Chip visited Cedar Rapids, he ended up cutting Juan's daughter's birthday cake.

In 1982, Juan was an unsuccessful candidate for

• Please turn to back page: Juan Cortez

(OVER)

side is called Fourteenth Avenue and the west side is called Sixteenth Avenue. So that was the biggest majority of the population was Czech as you got closer up on to the southeast side, where Tyler school is, you had Czech as well as many Syrian population. There weren't that many Greek people around in the area except over towards the Fourth Avenue area. Say around the Eighth Avenue area is where the Italian and Greek people mostly lived, around where Mercy hospital happened to be located now and expanded in that area. But our biggest residential population were the Czech people. I would say there weren't more than 10 or 15 negro or black minority population. There were about 3 or 4 Mexican families. I don't recall there being any Indian population at that particular time.

CW: So the Rodriguez' came later.

Cortez: Yes. The Rodriguez' came around 1920. There were two Cortez families in Cedar Rapids in the early days in the 1920's. One family that we weren't really related in a sense, but we were acquainted with the Cortez' over on C Avenue.

CW: They lived over on the northeast side.

Cortez: Yes. Back of where St. Luke's hospital expanded, where the parking lot is now.

Back to the make up of the area in the Oak Hill and Tyler school district including the Jackson school--that was on Fourth around Twelfth Street. In the Oak Hill area, we were the first to add on to the back of a small house, rebuild so in a sense because my father happened to have a kind of experience, I guess you would say, even though he couldn't speak very good

English, we did manage to build an upstairs and a back addition to lengthen the house and to make enough room for five children. Some of the people in the neighborhood would help out every now and then. I remember that we had several Mexican families, in the twenties, particularly Mr. Hernandoz, Mr. Hernando, and also a Gutierrez, and also a Sanchez. Mother and relatives and so forth, there were about, I'd say, a half dozen Mexican families right in the Oak Hill area. There was a particular Christ Sanctified church on the corner of Thirteenth Avenue and Fifteenth Street that the biggest majority of the minority black population and some of the white population went to the church. The pastor was Reverend Darden at that particular time. My mother was very active in that particular church and my father, being Catholic, occasionally we'd go down to St. Wenceslaus Church and particularly only on Christmas or Easter, which was the only two important days. And rarely, because there were no blacks in the St. Wenceslaus or catholic churches hardly in that particular early years, that it just was sort of uncomfortable. But I do remember when we used to go down to St. Wenceslaus church and then go over to the--what we call Sinclair Park. The packing house had baseball games across the street. The park area, every Wednesday night, we had movies during the summer hot season. They had silent films in the playground area. The only time we had a chance to really go to a movie was when the theatre was open on Third Street and Twelfth Avenue. They were silent films at that particular time before talking movies came into popularity. The minorities really weren't allowed in the



theatres but in some downtown theatres they could go up and sit in the balcony. It wasn't that inconvenient and it wasn't that people were insulting it was a sort of subtle way of discrimination and bias but they would usher you up to the balcony area. And nobody seemed to really mind because you could see rather well up there. I do remember when the changes started coming about. I remember because I sold newspapers as a boy from age--well, earlier, around seven, eight years old, my mother used to have us two boys sell the Literary Digest and the Liberty magazine and the Chicago Defender, it was a black newspaper, so we were very active in meeting the public and that was prior to my mother going into business. We sold quite a few newspapers and magazines and as I got older, the I was able to get a job selling the Gazette for Herman Kiebel and his father and his brother. Kiebels had the newspaper stand on Second Avenue and Third Street, right in front of the post office--the old post office building, which is now the Weaver-Witwer Center. During that particular period of time, I remember one particular year when it was 30 below zero and had to have newspaper inside of my rubber overshoes to keep my feet warm because we had a hole in our shoes and so naturally it just seemed like it was a common thing to do. Those were real difficult hard times, and especially when employment--we had employment during the Depression days, but as it got into the late twenties and the early thirties, it was very difficult because there was so much layoff and even though my father worked two or three days a week, at least he'd bring home fifteen dollars every two weeks. We did exist on

from eating the eggs from great big large catfish that we used to get from the river. Sometimes people who were passing through--hoboes--and it was common knowledge that they could always sell a fish or exchange the fish for something to eat at my mother's little restaurant or it was a store front. But she always did feed strangers or people that were passing through. They'd bring these big fish over and some of these fish had what we'd call "caviar", big sacks of eggs in it and some were red and some were orange and some were yellow. So we had accustomed taste of caviar long before we really knew what caviar was really. Because I know catfish and the famous fish that we have in the Cedar River they grew pretty large and they still have some large fish there. But we weren't allowed to go swimming because there were several people that really drowned and got electrocuted in the river. So we had to stay away from the river and we were pretty, I guess you might say, well-disciplined boys because in reality we were kept busy when we were young. We were allowed to sell newspapers, we were allowed to participate in sports. We were to the first one, in the twenties, to have a bathtub installed in the house after we had added on to the kitchen area and had plumbing put in. I can remember people coming in and looking and seeing the bathtub and the inside toilet and inside running water. Then I guess we had a kind of a misfortune because on a Christmas day back in the early thirties, maybe around 1932, my oldest sister died. They never did diagnose the ~~actual~~ reason of her death because in that particular time they called it a "complete exhaustion". But she died

on a Christmas morning. Then the following year on an Easter morning, my baby sister died of practically the same thing. My older sister was about fifteen or sixteen and she was a senior at old Washington high school that used to be down by Greene Square Park. She was due to graduate. The youngest sister was about four or five years old when she died. It was pretty close to have a Christmas and an Easter death in the family. I remember after that the doctor, which was Dr. Vorpaugh, in those days was also the coroner--he was one doctor that really kind of was a prominent doctor for people who lived in the Oak Hill area as well as all over town. He insisted that the rest of the family, boys and girls, go to the hospital and have their tonsils taken out. Whatever reason there was for that, I know I was selling newspapers on the corner and my mother came and got me and said that we had to go to the hospital and have our tonsils taken out. So we wound up, all of us, in the hospital at the same time. I remember getting ice cream that was served and so forth. Since that particular time, we never had any other illnesses to my knowledge and the particular, I guess, reasons are there wasn't near as much illness was because we had the Jane Boyd community house that Mrs. Boyd's father was a physician and it was his intent, really, to service the emergency needs of the people in that particular area as well as the Czech and the minority people in the community. That's really, I think, the purpose of Jane Boyd at that particular time, which later on continued to be an educational center as well as a recreational center. We had boxing instruction classes, there were rug weaving classes,

sewing classes (for the girls), a pool table. Just a complete all-around recreational center, as well as a center where people would have their medical needs taken care of. I do remember before we had our tonsils taken out that our house and one or two others on the block were quarantined because of measles or whooping cough. Nobody could come in or out of your house at that particular time. Maybe sometimes that when they finally got around to giving people vaccinations that it wiped out the whooping cough and the measles being nearly as serious as it was in the old days. Now, it's not near as serious. I remember when we moved after going to the service--I went to the Army in 1941--I was drafted and served about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  years, almost 5 years. I remembered the dirt streets that we had in the Oak Hill area when I was a child. When I went away, came back from the service, they hadn't done anything in the Oak Hill area as far as upgrading the neighborhood because I guess Cedar Rapids was kind of late getting started with urban renewal and federal funds. In those days, I guess a lot of people didn't really want to get involved with federal funds because they didn't understand how beneficial it would be. Finally we got Oak Hill--Twelfth Avenue, the main street--was paved. That was pretty close to 1946, at that late date. From then on, then there was much paving done and much more extensive plumbing and beautification of the Oak Hill area.

We're back to the community, the neighborhood, the churches, the jobs. The first families, to my knowledge, I could be--being a young person in my sixties-- I wouldn't remember a lot of the

names that probably some other people would have remembered but on first thought, we had a very well-known family named Mrs. Tart who was directly a neighbor. Her husband was the custodian for the church on Third Avenue and Sixth Street. The name of the church is the--just opposite of the First Presbyterian Church--Unitarian Church. He had been custodian there for many years. Next door to Mrs. Tart--she was the last house, the first house so to speak from Eleventh Street, coming up towards our particular house. Then between Mrs. Tart, there was Mrs. Blakey. She was our immediate neighbor to the west. Mrs. Blakey had seven children, I believe. My mother and father had six, but one had died, so they were on various odd years, my mother would have a child and Mrs. Blakey would have a child. But in that particular area that was . . . then next to the other side of us was Mrs. Boone. Mrs. Boone had three sons and her husband had died earlier. But the majority of the black families in Cedar Rapids back in the early twenties had originally come from the mining community of Buxton, Iowa, and settled around in the Oak Hill and the Time Check area. You know, a lot of people today think that Oak Hill is the black community. It has never, in Cedar Rapids, been a black--per say--community. It's always been an under-graded community. More black minorities lived on the southeast side than lived in the Time Check area, but in the early twenties there were equally the same amount on both sides of the river because Time Check area happened to be the area where people that worked on the railroads--it was the center there where they would check in and punch the time clocks across



the river from Quaker Oats. There were a lot of minorities that worked there, as well as Mexicans, that checked in there to work on the railroad tracks and so forth. My father worked at Quaker Oats and consequently he could walk back and forth from Twelfth Avenue downtown. But during the early twenties, Quaker Oats had a warehouse where Iowa Steel is now, on Twelfth Avenue, between Fifth Street and the railroad tracks on Fourth Street. That was an unloading area--dock area--where the trains came in and he'd unload the grain to go on trucks that would be delivered over to the Quaker Oats company on Third Street NE there. And across the street was the canning factory that farmers brought their products in and there was a well-established cannery there. Many of the well-to-do millionaire families in Cedar Rapids came from the Oak Hill area. The Nassifs, for instance, and the Weibes, and the Kaceres, and--I can't remember all of the names--but they were well-to-do people and the Bohemian people and I can't think of all the names of people that . . . Many of the prominent citizens, for instance, everybody knows Reverend Bill Harnisch came from our particular area--right across the street from Tenth Street, down from the Jane Boyd community house. Now let me kind of vary off of the people, community, and go to the job area. Back in the twenties and the thirties it was very difficult if you didn't have a tie-in with a particular factory or with someone who worked there. It was difficult to really get situated into a job. Blacks didn't have any office jobs or they didn't have any clerical jobs downtown in any of the businesses. But some of the businesses, like a barber shop was

located downtown. Several shoe shine shops was probably the only thing an individual--a young person--had to look forward to. And working in the hotels or the motels as a maid or a clean-up person--maintenance. Jobs, in a sense, if your father or some relative was working there, in particular my own case, they just weren't hiring anybody else once someone was there. Like my father was working Quaker Oats, if he had died, then I could take his place. It was very kind of a situation where there weren't too many minorities. I think there were only one or two blacks at Quaker Oats at the time. My father being Mexican, there were two Mexicans there. At the packing house there were many minority blacks there. But they had the jobs in the freezer part--the cold part--even though they worked in different various areas, they still had a very difficult time getting hired if you didn't have a relative already there or knowing or was in good with a foreman. They had one day that they would hire--from my knowledge of the habitual hiring day--would be a Thursday was labeled as a day that blacks might get hired. Was the only day that they would ever be considered being hired. That was a reputation at Sinclair Packing House in those days. Penick and Ford was a very good place to work if you could get on, which, like I said, you had to know somebody. I guess that's the way it is today, too, when you look at it. You go to Job Service and you make out an application and you're interviewed, but you won't get a job unless somebody from that particular plant that you wanted to go to had called the employment office

and said, "Send so-and-so up to the office". There is a tie-in with everything today. Jobs in those particular days, in the twenties and the thirties, and that's one of the reasons why I left because I was a close friend of Clinton Blakey, who had quit high school to go to work in the packing house because there was an opening. He didn't finish his senior year because he'd better take the opportunity because things didn't look too bright. When I was in high school, we didn't have counselors to the degree that you consider counselors today, because I took chemistry and physics and economics and I went to an extra semester in high school just because there weren't any jobs and I wanted to get some specialty and I was told that it didn't make sense for me to take chemistry because they weren't going to be hiring any . . . blacks didn't have a chance in any chemical or chemistry area. In a sense, it was kind of true except for the fact that there was the Collins family who was an old family of Cedar Rapids. The Collins brothers worked at Penick and Ford and one particular Collins boy was in the chemist department at Penick and Ford. They all went to Coe College and they graduated and got good jobs. One particular one worked with the Ford Motor Company in Detroit and was a supervisor in charge of a section in the plant, well respected. I can't remember distinctly too much more about prominent families except for the fact that we had two people that worked on the Police Department. That was Baldy Wilson was the maintenance man--custodian--at the police department back in the early twenties and a famous individual as far as baseball was concerned. Was

an excellent baseball player. And we had Virgil Powell, who was in the police department as a--supposed to have been--a patrol man, but he was inside the police department, worked as a finger print expert. He was fortunate enough to set up a system of filing finger prints and identifications that the FBI, it was a known fact that the FBI followed his particular characteristics of fingerprinting and whatever system he used. But he was never really considered a full policeman, in a sense, because he worked inside. But he would be able to wear a uniform occasionally. I guess, you might say, in those early days, they didn't want a black person in uniform as a law enforcement officer. Today it's still a kind of a hard fact for them to face the fact that we only have one because they haven't overcome the atmosphere of having to work with black officers. I remember in the early sixties when one particular official in the police department had asked the whole entire force at a roll call morning meeting that if they hired a black would they be willing to work with and no one volunteered to say that they would work with a black so in the sixties it was kind of hard at still being difficult to face the reality that all people are able to work together. At the present time, we have one young fellow named Caldwell and he's so far very successful and seems to be working out real well. Of course, most of the hard-core individuals that didn't think they could work with a black have recently retired and now there's new blood with a new police captain. So time, I guess, makes a change. I remember when the first telephones came in, also, and I remember the system before the dialing came in back

in the twenties. We had a telephone and I remember the old streetcar tracks that used to come up Twelfth Avenue. On the front of the street cars they had a big revolving brush that would brush the snow away in front of it. It was a trolley car and run by electricity. I remember in the early twenties and thirties the snow would be piled up so high that you couldn't really see the houses on the street because the snow had been brushed over towards the curb. In those days, the streets were kind of narrow. The streetcars ran all the way up to about 16th Street and then turned around up there as it got close to the cemetery, then went back down Twelfth Avenue to Third Street. I think went over to Third Street back to downtown. And the InterUrban train that was run by CRANDIC railroad station back and forth to Iowa City that stopped down where Smulekoff's is along the river. And the old bus depot--I think today we have the worst Greyhound bus depot system in all the world. Of course, we have a nice transportation system, but I just think that our transportation system could be upgraded. I think we have gone backwards as far as the train and transportation system in Cedar Rapids is concerned because we used to have a train come through Cedar Rapids every 30 minutes on the half-hour. We had stream-lined trains, freight trains, and the city of Los Angeles, the city of Denver, the Hiawatha, the one up to Minnesota. Cedar Rapids was flourishing as far as transportation. I'm really happy to see the airport being expanded because I think that we are not only in need of trains but we also are more dependent on airline but I think if the railroads were upgraded and updated

and the railroads would prosper today as well as the airlines because I think that that's a faster kind of a communication or transportation as well as communication because our mail used to go by train to Chicago and Omaha and we didn't have such a long wait. Today it seems like that our mail situation is not as good as it could be. It could be upgraded. As a matter of fact, we could even install helicopter service, which they shy away from, if you wanted to really get good service. I've seen the Cedar River be improved and the downtown area as far as the river going through Cedar Rapids. The parks department has done an excellent job along the river for the First and A Avenue where the farmers' market used to be. They used to pull their wagons in up there at A Avenue and First Street West and unload their supplies and their chickens and watermelons and vegetables and flowers. Now that we have the roundhouse it doesn't seem to be the same thing but it does have a place for farmers to bring their crops. I hope that never ends with so many farmers going bankrupt. I've seen our particular Gazette newspaper really really kind of be improved even though the delivery service is not as good as it was in the old days when we had boys on the bicycle and door-to-door newspaper. We didn't have near as much confusion as we have today when everything is so scientific. Collection seems to be harder today than it was during the Depression days. Our radio stations, I guess, in the old days we had one station that I can remember and I can remember as a small boy my brother that had been working on the railroad in Minneapolis came home back in the twenties with the home-made



radio with a little disk and it was the two tin cans that we get to hear Guy Lombardo and Fletcher Henderson and other people on the radio. Just on that crystal set. Well, speaking in regard to radios, you know, it seemed like the radio was a kind of a mystical device in a sense. A lot of people didn't really believe the radio when they heard it. But a lot of people believed that they could hear music in the air prior to radios really being developed and modernized. I distinctly remember other older people saying they could hear music in the air and presumably it might have been because somebody might had their radios up too loud or something even in those days and there weren't many people that had radios. I remember we had a Zenith radio, it was a large cabinet type style. Mostly the radios were mainly geared towards music and emergency news. The radio-- we'd listen for boxing and for national news and bands. It just seemed like it was a strange thing to have the music interrupted for a news item or the news interrupted for an emergency announcement of some kind. There wasn't too much play given towards the weather. Occasionally it did tell you what the weather would be like, not as scientific as it is today. The radio grew from a very small thing into a big cabinet size that was very decorative and then into what we have today. I think there would seem to be more home atmosphere when you had a radio than it is today when you have a television. It seems like television today it just has an attraction for one person only, the immediate person that wants to turn it on to that particular program. Where the radio was an item that everybody wanted to listen to at that

particular time. It just was an enjoyment for everybody.

Along the subject matter of black businesses: I can vaguely remember my mother's and father's venture into a business-type arrangement at our particular home. The church--I think it kind of initiated because of church--various meetings or groupings on Sunday they would come to our particular house because we had a large basement and everybody would come and congregate in the basement for a Sunday dinner. As we added onto our home, I guess it kind of struck my mother's mind because of the fact she mentioned that when she was down south in Texas--and other people had mentioned that they had down south this item they called "grits". She was constantly trying to find out why they didn't sell grits in Iowa. So, because my father worked at Quaker Oats, there was some arrangement with Witwer grocery store that she would attempt to get a box of grits and I think he was instrumental in encouraging her to start up a kind of a business to sell grits. So I remember taking a little wagon, my mother and I walking down--my brother also occasionally--walking down to Weaver Witwer's warehouse on Third Street and Tenth Avenue and we'd get items and stack them on the front porch in a sort of an arrangement. Our father finally built a counter and my mother would serve chili and hot tamales. It kind of started out with corn shucks that we used to have in the back yard in that big farm area that we kind of worked the farm and we had plenty of shucks and she knew how to make hot tamales and chili. So, so many people wanted to buy hot tamales, so it branched out from hot tamales and chili to grocery goods and then from grocery



goods and then from grocery goods to an ice cream freezer and from an ice cream freezer then to an automatic pop machine. After we had pop and ice for so many years and the machine came into existence which we put the pop machine first on the front porch and people would come in and after space got so crowded, people wanted to come in and sit down and eat chili and hot tamales and we moved the pop machine outside and people would come there during the evenings and early morning and evening to get bottles of pop out of the pop machine. So it was really a flourishing business, in a sense. Then we finally got fresh bread and milk. So it was just kind of started into a very prosperous kind of a nickel and dime business. I think my mother and father did an excellent job in giving us the kind of education to meet people and do business with people and to meet sales people and to just be a center where people came and we'd just learn how to . . .

END OF SIDE ONE TAPE ONE

. . .I believe was the only minority-owned business in the whole Oak Hill area.

Other businesses that were in the Cedar Rapids area was the barber shop that was originally downtown on First Street and then as they moved the farmer's parking area along First Street, the barber shop moved to Third Street and Eighth Avenue and off of there was a sort of a restaurant, too. But that was owned and operated by a Mr. Collins and as the Reed family, after his graduation, and I remember when the Reed brothers and sisters won various awards on amateur night at the Iowa theatre tap

dancing and they kind of became well-known as tap dancers and they formed a group and made pretty good money as a tap dancing team. Then, during World War II, his business--floor finishing--when he happened to be a good friend of Bud Jensen and I think kind of encouraged him to go into the floor finishing after he learned that trade of working at it some time. That got to be a very well-known business that helped support his family. I can't quite remember where, what--Mr. Reed, I think, worked on the railroad. They used to live right on Tenth Avenue between Seventh and Eighth Street, where the present St. Vincent DePaul store is. For many, many years I remember that's where they lived. Of course, Cecil and I and his brothers and sisters were friends. I wasn't here during World War II because I was drafted in 1941 and what really transpired after 1941 to 1960 because after the service--almost five years in the service--I went to Chicago and started my career in the post office. Then, because they only had one mailman in Cedar Rapids, Mr. Lorry, for many, many years. Then the door was open to more blacks entering the post office in the forties and fifties after the World War II. Wesley, John Wesley Collins and his brother were successful at getting a civil service job. Then I transferred in 1960 to Cedar Rapids and came back because my mother and father were in their eighties. I felt it was my duty to come back and assist my family because my brothers and sisters were away from home. So I guess seeing Cedar Rapids grow to that extent and the affect of the human rights committee and the civil rights committee have an important part and role in integration and also opening



up the eyes of the public in regard to the bias and the treatment and the door that was shut to so many jobs to minorities and blacks. One particular thing that still exists today is the fact that the Chamber of Commerce still had not included in their publications any black minorities performing or pictured as being a part of the employment picture in the Cedar Rapids area. I've talked to them several times years ago. There's still not any indication that there are blacks in the Cedar Rapids area in very well-known jobs: personnel, engineers, secretaries, even bosses at Wilson's. They have never shown any black bosses or black typists, or black engineers or whatever. The only time you see a photo of a black person is when the police department may have a recruitment job and they show a picture of a black patrolman. But still the doors are not completely wide open in the Cedar Rapids area. There is still some feeling of a little bit of bias or undercurrent discriminatory personality so to speak.

Speaking of people that have--of minorities--that have been successful or have risen from the so-called lower class level and Cecil Reed being a businessman that did run for office as a state representative and was successful to that extent. I think, if I'm not mistaken, I don't remember anybody else having been that successful in being a black representative from this area. Even today, we've never had another black representative in the state of Iowa from this particular area nor have we had a black representative on the county board or the city council. Those are offices that, really, there aren't enough blacks to support

the election to carry the weight. But more and more we have been successful in educating black and minorities to vote. I know my mother didn't vote all her life that she'd been here until I ran for the office of state representative and she voted that particular time. But I remember in our particular school area, between Tyler school, McKinley school, and Jackson school and in the early days there was an Adams school that was on Fifth Street and about Sixth or Seventh Avenue. We had excellent I think, principals, like Mrs. Prescott that comes to mind. And the football and track coach, Mr. Pallew. They were very instrumental, I think, in encouraging blacks. Of course, my comment about the counselor service at that particular time wasn't the greatest and, I guess, really in a sense there wasn't really the foresight to think that blacks really could accomplish, or maybe it was because it was a sign of the times that it might have been a jealous feeling that if a black did succeed, it would push a white person out. So you never can understand, really, human nature but in those particular days, I guess, it was the survival of the fittest and if you were able to overcome and be successful, you had to really have friends, sure, but you had to have more initiative and I think that's the way it is today, too. You have to have some initiative and show a sign of interest in progressiveness. It just takes that kind of a person. We did have, I think, excellent school teachers in the McKinley and Tyler school area. I remember during a time during the twenties, late twenties and early thirties, my brother--I don't remember distinctly how we come in contact with Grant Wood--but he did



paint a picture of my brother. Now I don't know how old Grant was in that particular day and age, but I used to go with him over to Grant Wood's studio and see my brother pose. I also remember the times that Grant Wood--I can't remember just where the studio was, but it appears to me that it might have been in the rear end of Turner's Mortuary, the studio upstairs. But my brother and I sold newspapers and if I'm not mistaken, I think Don Ameche and some other movie stars were going to McKinley school during that particular period. I distinctly remember some of the football players. Frank Yakovech was a very well-known name as far as football and Jim Nance was an outstanding athlete at the time, Joe Renas, who was an outstanding athlete and also a boxer in Cedar Rapids and went quite far in boxing. It's hard for me to remember now, because I didn't just keep track of all those things. Who was prominent: I remember Duke Schleder who used to play football down at Iowa, used to come to Cedar Rapids on weekends and he used to stay at our particular home over on Twelfth Avenue over the weekends. He visited many of the people. In those days, blacks couldn't stay in the hotels, so naturally had to share their homes. I remember when I was a youngster, of course, my mother and father had had a big addition to the house so we could double up and sleep in other rooms. Our house was shared with Louis Armstrong and we also shared the house with Cab Calloway and Gene Calloway came. I remember the great big bus in those days that they had. That used to park out in the front on Twelfth Avenue when they stayed at our particular home. It was interesting, after hearing them

on the radio, and then they'd come to town. The only place they could play was at the Paramount Theatre or the Danceland. When they played, they couldn't stay at the Montrose, so they had to make arrangements for somebody's house to live in. I remember the blacks couldn't dance on the floor in the Danceland so they could go up to the balcony and look and watch. That seemed to be, in those particular days, I guess, there wasn't too many people that even knew or even thought about going to the Danceland. But they did stay at our house and I never did remember going downtown to watch them play except the last performance that Louis Armstrong had. We went to the Paramount Theatre and heard him play at the Paramount Theatre. It was kind of a luxury thing, even though it may have only cost 50 cents to get in, we didn't have 50 cents to even pay to get in to see a band or go up to the Danceland.

With reference to the notables or people that were nationally known: I distinctly remember, as I said before, that Duke Schleder, who later on became district judge in Chicago, after graduating from Iowa. I met him and I was a personal friend of his. I worked on his campaign in Chicago, and also worked on the campaign for Mayor Daly when he first ran and for several of the district attorneys during my stay in Chicago after World War II. Back in Cedar Rapids, I remember also, the two brothers that played on the football team--I'm trying to think of the name. Also, the fact that the hotels weren't open to minorities until the late, I think, sixties. I think it was a well-known news item that Marion Anderson would not come to Cedar Rapids



because she could not stay at the Roosevelt Hotel. In a sense, I guess, we got to know all those people and felt a closeness to minorities where today you don't get that closeness of notables coming to Cedar Rapids. I remember the last time I met Cecil Reed since he's been appointed to a federal job and lives in Kansas City. I happened to be at the Five Seasons Center, and happened to be looking out the window and I thought I saw him on the corner and nobody else knew he was in town. He went from the legislative job to the department of labor--appointment to the department of labor--with the office in the Kansas City, Kansas, area, I believe. The hotel and motel thing, I think, had been closed for quite some time. The fact that many of the football players and the people that graduated from Iowa had to leave Iowa to go to places where it would be open to them and where they could prosper and maybe conduct a business. The Chicago area being close enough that even I went to Chicago to try to advance. Iowa still hadn't been receptive to a lot of things. Especially Cedar Rapids being the second largest city. I guess Des Moines did advance quite, maybe, rapidly because there were several black attorneys in the Des Moines area, where in Cedar Rapids we never had a black attorney until these recent years. We had one fellow who graduated from Iowa that wanted to be an attorney and he went to Detroit to practice so we missed out on him. It was one of the Tate boys who lived over in the Time Check area. I guess to reminisce on the fact that I feel that maybe I would not have gained the inspiration and the knowledge--and I tell many young people today if they're going off

to college, "Don't hesitate to go away to college." Not to stay around Cedar Rapids to go to college because you have that experience of venture, adventure and experience of meeting other people in other states. My son wanted to go to Iowa and he had an option to go to Iowa or to St. Louis, the University of St. Louis, but I encouraged him to go to Loras College. After graduating from Loras College, he met many other business friends, or students, that went to Loras the same time. It's just an ideal introduction to meeting people--progressive people--that you otherwise wouldn't have met. I think my experience of working in the Chicago area and meeting many prominent people that were successful that really came from Iowa. My daughter, having worked in a brokerage house in the Chicago area, met a fellow that came from Cedar Rapids and was surprised that she was from Cedar Rapids and also Iowa. Back when I was first inducted in the army, I remember distinctly that the only advantage I had, because during World War II, the army was segregated. Whites were in one particular company and blacks had a company of their own. The fact that there were so many southern boys, young boys in our particular regiment that I progressed so rapidly as a non-commissioned officer, but there were no black officers at the time. Because this wasn't open to black officers, they were being segregated. I rose very rapidly because I could read and write and had a lot of experience and was selected to control the big business as far as post exchanges as they call it. I opened eight post exchanges all over the island of--the Panama Canal zone area--the Trinidad area because I had worked in the



Woolworth company store before being drafted and had some knowledge of business operation. I guess after that particular crisis in the Panama Canal zone area was over, then our regiment was broken up and brought back to the States. Then I was put into an infantry unit and it was my job to take--I was selected to take because I was staff officer, Tech Sergeant (next to the highest rank as non-commissioned officer) the next step would have been First Sergeant, but I was asked to get six other non-coms and we were sent to Fort Maryland to pick up a guardhouse full of minorities, blacks that were either uncontrollable or had been drafted and wouldn't stay in the army. They had various reasons why they were in a guardhouse. I had to take those men and train them and build up their confidence because they needed them overseas, it was just after the Battle of the Bulge. I remember getting those men on the train with my particular six non-coms. We had about 60 of those fellows from the guardhouse. I managed to get overseas and they turned out to be very, very good conducted soldiers. Some went from the private to corporal and to sergeant because they finally got somebody to instill some confidence in them. I distinctly remember the time when I was in charge of a big condo area that was where the German war prisoners were and my particular infantry group was guarding the compound. A big storm came up and we thought the soldiers were restless because there was so much confusion we didn't know--we couldn't speak their language--but I was in charge and I thought there was going to be a break or something. Somebody was knocking out the lights, the bulbs that we had around the

big high fenced area. It just turned out that the storm was so bad it kept knocking the light against the post. They weren't really anxious to go anyplace because they were glad to get out of the war. They were in the compound and knew they were safe. They had an interpreter, in particular, sometime sooner or later, came over and they had some complaint about the food and they found out what they were complaining about was that they were getting too much cake. They weren't accustomed to eating white bread. It was too soft, and they described that as cake. They were used to very tough, rough rye bread or what not. So we never did have any problem from the German soldiers. I remember moving from there into another area after following Patton and his tank, my infantry troop had to guard the supply trucks going up and taking gasoline and artillery to Patton. After we got so far up and it was after the signing of the end of the war, we were sitting on the side of a hill and shooting our rifles and automatic weapons up into the treetops with the Russian soldiers. It seems like our particular infantry group was a kind of a lost company because every time we'd move someplace our infantry company regiment would be someplace else. We never did catch up with them so we attached or assigned on a trucking, quartermaster trucking company. There were three times that we were informed by Eisenhower's command office to board ship. The second lieutenant who was with us, in charge of the group that had been sent down to Marseilles to make preparations for our being shipped over to Guam or someplace else. Our orders were to board the boat and I mentioned that--having worked in headquarters--I



notified the lieutenant that we couldn't board ship because we weren't up to full strength. He said he wouldn't be the one to go to headquarters to tell them. I said, "Well, I'll go to tell them." So I got a jeep, went up to headquarters and told them we weren't up to a complete staff--Eisenhower's headquarters people--so they cut an order and said they'd delay it. So we delayed it for about three months and by the time our commanding officer, who was up in the northern part of France and we were in the southern part of France before he came down. We had the point system and anyone who had over so many points were eligible to go home. We were fortunate because I had been scheduled for that advance party to go to Guam. So I thought it was just sheer luck that I had went overseas and at least three times been under the attack of German subs or someway or another, almost thinking that maybe the ship might be sunk. Going down to the Panama Canal Zone area in the early forties--1942--and then going across the English channel, going into France, back in 1944 - 1945. So I felt that I was very lucky. But I think that the biggest luck showed up when after I took my infantry non-commissioned officer's training in Georgia, that just prior to the Battle of the Bulge there was so much segregation as I mentioned before. The blacks stayed in one unit and the whites stayed in another unit. Our training wasn't really altogether that separate, in that we were all in the same camp area. But the army shipped all of the white soldiers over to the Battle of the Bulge by plane and the black non-commissioned officers had to wait and go by boat. Before we had boat arrangements some of those same soldiers that

were trained were coming back wounded. So consequently, I think that my life had been saved just by discrimination and segregation. I probably wouldn't have been here today, I would have been right in the middle of the Battle of the Bulge because we were scheduled to go. So I think life has really been exceptionally good to me and that I was able to survive going through France and Germany and the Panama Canal Zone area and returning back and being able to become, I guess you might say, the first chairman of the Linn County Civil Service commission that established all the rules and regulations for their operation and the organizational procedure for the sheriff's department. Having been appointed by the county Board of Supervisors, also having the opportunity to be appointed by the Mayor to serve on the Civil Rights Commission to serve as one of their commissioners. At the present time, I guess, working in community organizations like the HACAP, that is the largest funded organization in the whole United States right here in Cedar Rapids, as far as helping people. I am president of the advisory board for HACAP and also serve on the board of directors of HACAP. I serve on the executive board of directors for the Catholic Charities for the Archdioceses of Dubuque. I'm also on the advisory board at Catholic Charities. I'm also one of the board members of the Boy Scouts of America--Hawkeye Area Boy Scouts. I'm also on the St. Vincent DePaul board of directors for the local store here. I've been the Knights of Columbus district deputy for the area around Cedar Rapids. All of the Knights of Columbus clubs were under my supervision at one time. I felt that being a member of St.



Wenceslaus church for over twenty some years now that--I've also just recently been elected to the parish counsel--I think I've seen a lot of things change and yet there's many changes to be made in the sense that a lot of jobs have to be opened and a lot of employment is necessary here. We don't have enough housing for low-income people and I'm not speaking of those low-income people that can't afford housing, I'm just talking about those people that are in the medium bracket range that the homes are really a little bit out of their budget to really become accustomed to paying a kind of a fixed monthly payment for a place to live. Of course, with the infiltration of many people from out of state, that has opened up areas and different areas but the fact that I still live in the Oak Hill area--I think that someone that has been successful (and I feel that I have been successful) and I have maintained my residence here because of the fact that I don't think this is a bad neighborhood. There has been a stigma attached to the Oak Hill area that it seems like may never be erased in view of the fact that Oak Hill has been in somewhat a slum neighborhood. But slum neighborhoods, persay as they consider slum, Oak Hill or Cedar Rapids really doesn't have a slum neighborhood. They may have a declining area but ninety percent of the homes in the area are of good quality that it wouldn't take very much but a few federal funds or some program to help maintain and supply the low interest rate for those people to have an upkeep on their homes if they're purchasing. If they're renting, then it's really not their particular fault that the house is declining because the absentee landlords do

have a tendency to think that they don't have to look in that direction when complaints are made about the upkeep of the place. I think we have a long ways to go to look towards humane treatment and helping our brothers--our neighbors--and maintaining a good community. When I make reference to maintaining a good community, I'm making some reference to the fact that there has been a new development in cooperation with the police department and the city of Cedar Rapids. In the community a few years ago, we had an incident at what we used to call the "Brown Derby" in the community, whereas the police were on the one side and the black community was on the other. Now there has recently been established a little bit of a coordination of--a cooperation between the community and the police department, so that's really progress. I had the experience of working at the courthouse after retiring from the post office. For about seven and a half years, I worked at the courthouse as the chief court bailiff. I remember Tiny Grant, who was the sheriff at that particular time, had asked my wife if I had any plans upon retirement. My wife--when I retired I had hoped to go to Mexico and try to get acquainted with all the relatives on my father's side, having met my mother's relatives in Texas. I hadn't really visited San Louisa but to see Mexico where my father was born and where the other relatives that are around Mexico are. She didn't want to take the time off from work, not knowing how ill she was or what her health condition was, but at least she didn't feel that she wanted to retire from being office manager at the YWCA. My work at the courthouse, starting out as one of the court bailiffs,



first under Tony Scolaro--who was judge at that particular time--  
and then being appointed the chief court bailiff by Judge Veator  
who is now the chief supreme . . .

[TAPE ENDS ABRUPTLY]

INTERVIEW TOPICS  
CEDAR RAPIDS: THE EARLY DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

## I. PERSONAL LEAD-IN QUESTIONS

- 1--When were you born? Where?
- 1--How long have you lived in Cedar Rapids?
- What are your parents' names?
- 1--Where did you go to school?
- 32--Are you married or single?
- 26--Did you raise a family? How big?
- 20,32--What has been your occupation (career) during your adult years?

## II. COMMUNITY TOPICS

## A. Technology in the Community

- 1. Transportation
  - 1,15--Railway travel (Union Station, trips to Iowa City on Crandic)
  - 15--Trolleys (the Interurban)
    - Horses and First Automobiles
  - 9--Mud roads and the seedling mile
    - Hunter Airport and the first planes
    - Cedar River (ferries, floods, dams)
- 2. Communications
  - 5,16--Newspapers
  - 16,17--Radios
    - Advertising
  - 14-15--Telephones

## B. People in the Community

- 1. Amusements/Recreation --19,24
  - 4--Motion Pictures
  - 4--Cedar Rapids Parks
    - Dances
    - Carnival Week
    - Chautauqua
    - Community Theater
    - Little Gallery
    - Symphony Orchestra
    - Circus
    - Greene's Opera House
    - Amusement Parks (Alamo)
    - Camps
    - Community Centers (YWCA, YMCA)
- 2. Famous Characters--23
  - Cherry Sisters
  - 22--Grant Wood
    - Carl Van Vechten (The Tattooed Countess)
    - Marvin Cone

## 3. Lifestyle

- Life before air conditioning
- Winter Activities
- Holidays (Memorial Day, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas)
- Clothing
- Toys
- Saloons/Taverns
- Farm Life

## 4. Family Life

- Household Help
- 9--Women's Roles
- 5,7--Childrens' Activities/Behavior
- 18--Sunday activities (Church life, Sunday Blue Laws)

## 5. Ethnic/Minority Life--8

- 2-3,4--Immigrants (Czech, Greek, German, etc.)
- Indians
- 4-5,10,23-25--Segregation of Blacks
- 11-12,13-14,20,21,26 --Jobs Available

## C. Organizations and Institutions in the Community --30-31

## 1. Education--13

- 8--Cedar Rapids Schools
- Coe College
- Mount Mercy College
- Cornell College

## 2. Government--32

- City Services
- Streets/Roads
- Relationship with Marion (Courthouse Dispute)

## 3. Medical--7-8,9

- Hospitals
- Patient-Doctor Relationship
- Broken Bones
- Polio, TB, Debilitating Diseases
- House Calls
- Home Delivery of Babies



## 4. Business and Economy

- 2,11,12--Local Factories (Douglas Starch Works, Quaker Oats, etc.)
- Local Brewing Companies
- Retail Businesses /Department Stores
- Professions
- Banking and Finance
- Restaurants (Greek Restaurants in 30's)
- 18-19--Businesses that no longer exist (old groceries, drygoods, icehouses)
- 16--Farmers Market
- Mills on Cedar River
- 5--Buildings Erected
- Manual Labor/Types of Jobs
- Companies (Labor Unions, Strikes, Pay)

## 5. Attitudes/Values

- Children/Discipline
- Sex/Petting
- Charity
- Divorce
- Work
- Working women, Voting Rights for Women
- Patriotism (World War I)

## D. Historic Events in and Outside the Community

## 1. Catastrophic Events

- Clifton Hotel Fire (1903)
- Douglas Starch Works Explosion(1919)
- Bank Closings (1933)
- Lyman-Stark Building Collapse(1913)
- Public Library Murder(1921)

## 2. National Historic Events

- Womens' Suffrage
- World War I
- Roaring 20's
- Prohibition

5-6--Great Depression

26-30--WWII