



## Oral History Interview of Edmund Crotty (OH-006)

Moakley Archive and Institute

[www.suffolk.edu/moakley](http://www.suffolk.edu/moakley)

archives@suffolk.edu

### Oral History Interview of Edmund G. Crotty

**Interview Date:** April 21, 2003

**Interviewed by:** Francis C. Weymouth Jr., Northeastern University student from HIST 4263-Spring 2003

**Citation:** Crotty, Edmund G. Interviewed by Francis C. Weymouth Jr. John Joseph Moakley Oral History Project OH-006. 21 April 2003. Transcript and audio available. John Joseph Moakley Archive and Institute, Suffolk University, Boston, MA.

**Copyright Information:** Copyright ©2004, Suffolk University.

#### Interview Summary

Ed Crotty, a member of Citizens for Participation in Political Action (CPPAX), reflects on his involvement in Latin American human rights and refugee issues. In this interview he discusses his activities as a member of CPPAX; his experiences with Congressman John Joseph Moakley and Moakley's aide, Jim McGovern, related to foreign policy in El Salvador; and his founding of the Immigration and Refugee Advocacy Coalition. He concludes by discussing Congressman Moakley's impact on immigration reform.

## **Subject Headings**

Citizens for Participation in Political Action (Mass.)  
Crotty, Edmund G.  
El Salvador -- Politics and government -- 1979-1992  
Extended Voluntary Departure  
Human Rights El Salvador  
Jamaica Plain Committee on Central America  
McGovern, James P., 1959-  
Moakley, John Joseph, 1927-2001  
United States -- Foreign relations -- Central America

## **Table of Contents**

<b>About Mr. Crotty</b>	<b>p. 3</b> (00:24)
<b>Citizens for Participation in Political Action</b>	<b>p. 4</b> (03:29)
<b>Citywide Education Coalition</b>	<b>p. 7</b> (11:16)
<b>El Salvador: Immigration and Aid Issues</b>	<b>p. 8</b> (14:06)
<b>El Salvador: 1989 Jesuit Murders</b>	<b>p. 13</b> (26:37)
<b>El Salvador: Follow-up by local organizations</b>	<b>p. 15</b> (33:32)
<b>Mr. Crotty's trip to Mexico</b>	<b>p. 18</b> (40:38)
<b>Mass. Immigration and Refugee Advocacy Coalition</b>	<b>p. 23</b> (51:20)
<b>Reflections on Congressman Joe Moakley</b>	<b>p. 26</b> (59:14)

**Interview transcript begins on next page**

This interview took place on Monday April 21, 2003, at the Suffolk University Law Library at 120 Tremont Street, Boston, MA.

**Interview Transcript**

**FRANCIS C. WEYMOUTH:** I want to start the interview with a couple of personal questions on your background. Number one is, where were you born?

**ED CROTTY:** Winchester, Massachusetts, eight miles north of here.

**WEYMOUTH:** And did you grow up in Winchester, Massachusetts?

**CROTTY:** Grew up in Winchester. Went to Winchester High School.

**WEYMOUTH:** And after you graduated from high school, you attended college?

**CROTTY:** Went from there to Yale and majored in Latin American studies and then went from there to the Peace Corps, for two and a quarter years in northeast Brazil.

**WEYMOUTH:** And while you were in the Peace Corps—can you expand on that a little bit?

**CROTTY:** It was—they were really into community development at that time. The Peace Corps was five years old when I went in and they almost every time had a community development hook to it. So I was public health and community development and they gave us a lot of training in latrines and sanitary water and all of that. But in my town I ended up in, I ended up using not very much of it, although I managed to keep myself pretty healthy and gave a lot of people some good health advice, I think, along the way. But I ended up doing more teaching and instructing, some leadership development stuff, and helped some other volunteers whose Portuguese is not as good as mine. Because I had a couple years of Portuguese in college, I helped them with a couple of their co-op projects, and so I ended up being an assistant producer of some other people's projects, and mostly doing some training and teaching things for my part.

**WEYMOUTH:** Okay, and where do you live now?

**CROTTY:** Jamaica Plain. Been there since 1973.

**WEYMOUTH:** 1973. And exactly when did you become interested in El Salvador?

**CROTTY:** Well, I've been interested in Latin America through college. As I said I kind of decided that one thing I wanted to come out with was the ability to speak a language and, rather imperfectly, I did learn Spanish and even Portuguese during my undergraduate years. And I had a survey course in Latin American history, survey course in Latin American political science, and already the kind of feudal nature of El Salvador and the economy and politics was somehow woven into that curriculum, and things were fairly quiet in El Salvador during those years. They heated up more into the seventies, but I guess I was always interested in it. I even had a fairly good friend who was from El Salvador. And his father was North American; his mother was Salvadoran. It was actually my first personal contact with El Salvador. Somebody who was two years behind me in college.

**WEYMOUTH:** The Citizens for Participation in Political Action [CPPAX]—can you explain what that particular group consisted of?

**CROTTY:** The two strands of it go back to the 1960s. One was Citizens for Participation in Politics, and that goes back to the 1968 presidential campaign when there was lots of grassroots upsurge about the Vietnam War that was already too far along and destroying too much landscape and too many lives; and there was also something called Mass. Political Action for Peace that came into existence, I think in the early sixties, around the mutually assured destruction of nuclear weapons; and the two of them merged some time in—I think it was the early seventies—probably just about thirty years ago to become CPPAX. That was the peace strand and the grassroots politics strand, and through grassroots action for peace it became part of it. Certainly El Salvador and those Third World struggles successive to the Vietnam experience were also part of its agenda.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now in 1982, you and nine other people signed a letter mailed to Congressman John J. Moakley. What prompted your group to write this letter to Congressman Moakley?

**CROTTY:** There was more and more concern about this little sort of proxy war between the East and West going on in El Salvador. And those of us who knew something about Latin America or just cared about the growing Latino population in Boston and the general area, decided that he was our congressman from Jamaica Plain, and so he was simply our connection with the United States House of Representatives, to try to provide—put some kind of brake on, put some sort of limits on what the Reagan administration was doing, having declared themselves a free hand. That this was going to be their own sandbox to play clandestine warfare in the Third World.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now prior to or after this letter, did your group attempt to contact any other senators, congressmen, anybody else from Massachusetts?

**CROTTY:** I'm sure that—well, certainly CPPAX—the Jamaica Plain letter would have been from some people with CPPAX and other people who were just Jamaica Plain activists. CPPAX was in touch with all of the Mass. congressional delegation and our senators, who at that time would have been—I guess Paul Tsongas<sup>1</sup> was—Paul Tsongas I think was still senator at that time, and certainly Ted Kennedy.<sup>2</sup> And Gerry Studds<sup>3</sup> from the South Shore, Tenth Congressional District, was very strong on these issues. He'd been in the foreign service once upon a time and was on the Foreign Affairs, or International Relations, as they called it at that time, Subcommittee of the House—Committee of the House. And Joe was our congressman for our district, and that's why we contacted him.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now you mentioned that you knew some El Salvadoran individuals in and around Boston; can you expand on that?

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul E. Tsongas (1941-1997), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts' Fifth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1975 to 1979, then represented Massachusetts in the U.S. Senate from 1979 to 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Moore "Ted" Kennedy (1932- ), a Democrat, has represented Massachusetts in the United States Senate since 1962.

<sup>3</sup> Gerald R. Studds (1937-2006), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts' Tenth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1973 to 1997.

**CROTTY:** I had a sort of indirect contact with Salvadorans in and around Boston. I, somewhere around this time, was involved in refugee issues so the human services work I did got me involved in a refugee program. That was really more for Southeast Asian refugees but I was dying to make more contact with people who were active in refugee issues. Around about that time and one of the active organizations at that time was something called Centro Presente,<sup>4</sup> and they were working a lot with Guatemalans and Salvadorans who had somewhat similar situations, although it was the Guatemalan situation [that] seemed to be divided more along ethnic lines, and the Salvadoran perhaps was arguably a bit more politically established and ideologically delineated, and certainly went back to land use issues that had—that went back for half a century and maybe even a century and a half.

**WEYMOUTH:** And had you previously had any encounters with Congressman Moakley? Had you written him before, had meetings with him before?

**CROTTY:** I had, I believe I had met with him on a few other things before. I'm trying to think of—perhaps not on Vietnam. My CPPAX involvement actually began about 1976. So I expect I probably was in a couple of—I'm quite sure I was in a couple of office meetings with him prior to 1983. But usually as a part of a group, living in the Ninth Congressional District—went with some other Ninth Congressional District people. It was maybe a—no, that would have been—well, U.S. direct involvement with Vietnam would have been over, but I think we met with him on some general peace issues, perhaps on some domestic policies as well. It was something that was encouraged every now and then to go on in and have a bunch of voters and activists from the district meet with the respective congressman from wherever in Massachusetts. I'd also—probably the first time I met him was back in 1972, when he was a city council member. Well, he probably wouldn't remember that; I do though, because he cast a critical vote to establish community schools in Boston.

**WEYMOUTH:** Can you expand on that a little bit?

---

<sup>4</sup> Established in 1981, Centro Presente is non-profit organization with headquarters in Somerville, MA, that is dedicated to assisting the Latin American immigrant community in Massachusetts.

**WEYMOUTH:** Yeah, that was sort of a brief office that he held between his first attempt to be elected to Congress, in 1970, and his second successful attempt to be elected to Congress, in the 1972 election, and he was an at-large Boston city councilor—everything was at-large at the time. And he'd come in and had no staked out position, and Boston was just beginning to open a round of new school buildings. Hadn't built anything very new for probably about twelve years. And they had a model they were doing that was being done in some other parts of the country, of retaining the school facilities for general public use after the regular school day, and this became a battle between the mayor and the Boston School Committee—which was separately and independently elected at the time—over who would control these multi-million dollar new school facilities.

And a group I was involved with at the time was interested in the possibility of extended use because the Boston School Committee was not known for sharing those facilities once they captured title to them. I think that Joe was the critical swing vote in passing an ordinance that authorized the City—that is City Hall, the executive branch—to retain title to these new buildings, and not automatically sign them over to the school department, and thereby lose all control and all authority over them forever after. So that would have been the first time I ever met him back around the middle of 1972.

**WEYMOUTH:** And the group you said you were involved in?

**CROTTY:** Oh, that was something called Citywide Education Coalition at the time. Part of our agenda for citizen involvement and reform of Boston public schools was that new school facilities ought to be community schools. That they shouldn't just lock the doors and everybody goes home at three o'clock in the afternoon, when in fact, they were multi-million dollar public investments that could also host afternoon programs, evening programs, and even weekend programs. Joe was receptive on that, he was open to being educated on it, and in the end he did the more visionary thing and didn't go with the entrenched interests of the school department.

**WEYMOUTH:** So he ended up voting for the schools?

**CROTTY:** He ended up voting in favor of the ordinance and allowing the full city government to retain title to the school buildings, so that they could program their use.

**WEYMOUTH:** Well, Ronald Reagan was elected president in the early 1980s, obviously, and he was a staunch anti-communist, and made many attempts to persuade the United States citizens that the guerillas in El Salvador were actually communist. How did this affect your cause, your group's push towards influencing Congressman Moakley into taking a stand on this issue?

**CROTTY:** Our approach to him and one that wasn't exactly fine-tuned to him, but we just took a very practical and not a doctrine or ideological approach. It's like, look at this—a country of about five million people, most of them are rural, most of them poor. People don't have land rights, infrastructure, and basically this is a war about human rights. Yeah, there may be some ideology overtones there, but this is not about—not like El Salvador is suddenly going to be a terrible threat to the well-being or the safety or the international security of the United States of America. This is really about people. This is about a feudal oligarchy deciding what the fate is going to be of some 95 percent of the five million that inhabit that little patch of ground, and Joe was one to see things really very much in direct human terms. He was not an ideological sort of person himself. He knew that all that rhetoric would fly around Washington and be seen in the editorial and Op-Ed pages, but he was a people person and this was a people issue.

**WEYMOUTH:** Getting back to El Salvador; as far as immigration goes, were you involved at all with the Sanctuary Movement?<sup>5</sup> Did your group have anything to do with that? Were you acquainted with anybody that did?

**CROTTY:** We were aware of it and I don't know if it was referenced in the letter, because I have not actually seen our letter. I guess that's probably a copy of it right there [attachment A]. A short letter. So it's basically just asking for a meeting with him, and our reference on that was

---

<sup>5</sup> First started in 1981, the Sanctuary Movement was an inter-denominational effort by congregations and temples in the United States to provide social services and support to Central American refugees who were denied asylum by the U.S. government. The movement has recently been revived and is officially called the New Sanctuary Movement. (see <http://www.newsanctuarymovement.org>)

a little petition form that Oxfam had developed [attachment B]. And it [the letter accompanying the petition; attachment C] had—it was—no military aid to El Salvador, I think, probably something about human rights. But I remember that, as I recall, there were four points and the last point was Extended Voluntary Departure [EVD], which is a kind of a very strange little term that they put in the Refugee Act of 1980, which at that point was only about less than three or four years old.<sup>6</sup>

But this was a relief for the attorney general, as a matter of discretion, that the United States could grant to the people who were in refugee-like circumstances, without declaring them permanent refugees. It was kind of a temporary refugee status, and at this point fleeing the devastation in El Salvador, there were already surely thousands of Salvadorans who had somehow made their way to the United States and would have been in great danger in going back; and this was something that we—because it was on this little petition, and we were also presenting him a pile of petitions, that probably added up to I would guess five, six, seven hundred signatures from mostly around Jamaica Plain.

And we said that also, How are you on military aid? Well, he didn't think that military aid was a good idea down there in this poor little country, and blowing it to smithereens and he was fine on the other three points; he said, "But I don't know about this one," and, "Explain it to me." We said, Well, this is giving people at least temporary safe haven. And he said, "It sounds okay;" he said, "Usually I just follow whatever—" then congressman, now senator from Iowa Tom Harkin<sup>7</sup>—"Usually I follow Harkin and Studds"—Gerry Studds from Quincy, actually Cohasset, but the Southeastern Massachusetts congressman—he said, "They know about this stuff and I figure whatever their position is on this, is going to be okay with me."

---

<sup>6</sup> According to Mark Krikorian, director of the Center for Immigration Studies, "as early as 1960, the executive branch created "Extended Voluntary Departure" (later rechristened "Deferred Enforced Departure") for aliens from specific countries as a temporary grant of blanket relief from deportation for nationals of certain countries who feared returning to their homelands. In effect, EVD was an exercise of prosecutorial discretion by the Attorney General in deciding not to force the departure of nationals of a certain country." (See the Center for Immigration Studies website at <http://www.cis.org/articles/1999/msktestimony3-4-99.html>)

<sup>7</sup> Thomas R. Harkin (1939- ), a Democrat, represented Iowa's Fifth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1975 to 1985, and has represented Iowa in the U.S. Senate since 1985.

At that point, he made the call to—in fact I noticed here Jim McGovern<sup>8</sup> was actually copied on the letter, which I had forgotten. Roger Kineavy<sup>9</sup> was the district manager. Jim McGovern was a relatively newly hired staffer down here but was starting to do—Joe was not very involved in foreign policy, but Jim I think was going to be his portfolio carrier for foreign policy issues back down in Washington. He [Moakley] got on the phone, called the Washington office, and said to Jim, as I recall it, when he had his office in the JFK Building here, “Will you find out where Harkin and Studds are on this Extended Voluntary Departure thing?” And we kept meeting a little bit and I would say within about five minutes the phone rings and it’s Jim calling back. He says, “Well, their take on this, their concern is all in El Salvador. They haven’t done anything on this; this is a domestic consequence of the El Salvador conflict.” And at which point Joe said, “Well, if nobody else is doing this, I’ll take it on.” He is—this is his commitment to us, and so this became again the U.S.A. domestic manifestation of the Salvadoran War.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now in 1982, President Reagan certified that El Salvador had complied with human rights conditions and could receive aid. As far as your group goes, what was your reaction? Or do you remember President Reagan making that statement to present aid to El Salvador?

**CROTTY:** Well, first of all, of course that was the cover and Vietnam was more recently behind us, and all of us knew—the Pentagon Papers at this point had already been published and we knew, we knew very well, that the government lied about little things like these conflicts emerging out of the Cold War, these little hot spots in the Cold War; we knew it just wasn’t true. It was clear there were death squads. These things were already well documented. The only place—they were just enough below the surface that Washington, basically the State Department, the Reagan administration, felt capable of denying it without their nose growing a meter long. And so it just wasn’t true. They were certifying that human rights standards were being met, because the law said they had to.

---

<sup>8</sup> James P. McGovern (1959- ), a Democrat, has represented Massachusetts’ Third Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1997. He was a member of Moakley’s congressional staff from 1982 to 1996. He worked extensively with Moakley on Salvadoran issues.

<sup>9</sup> Roger Kineavy served as Moakley’s district director from 1973 to 1994.

But they didn't—they had their fingers and toes crossed, they knew that was just a sick joke, but that's what gave them the freedom to wage, again, this clandestine war. Clandestine and not so clandestine, but it was a proxy war; there were advisors as there were at the beginning of the U.S./Vietnam experience. But not full deployment of troops because the Salvadoran army was—they had no compunction at all about mowing down peasants in El Salvador, that was no problem for them. And so they didn't need to send the troops in, but the certification of that—I couldn't quote him on this but I'm sure that—Joe was a very savvy person about human nature and he knew the difference between reality and fantasy, and knew that it just wasn't so.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now when you met with him, after this letter, did he have any idea what was going on in El Salvador, or was this something new to him that you guys were presenting?

**CROTTY:** He didn't know—I think it's fair to say he didn't know much about it in detail. He knew that it was this very, very bloody, painful proxy war and that was not something that his conscience or his view of what U.S. resources traded in reputation should be spent on. He also knew that the people he respected among his colleagues, like Tom Harkin and like Gerry Studds, that they were very clear that this was a terrible policy, that not only was it antithetical to the values of this country, it was ultimately going to be counterproductive, as it has been. All you're doing is wasting resources and you're killing people, and you're sowing bitterness, and there's nothing productive that can come out of a conflict like this.

So I'd say he knew that too. He needed no persuading on it, and he just went down this little petition and said, "On military aid, I'm with you on that. On human rights, I'm with you on that." And the one thing he just didn't know about was he said, "I don't know if I'm with you," or "I don't know where I am because I don't know what this thing E.V.D. means." Because again, it was a relatively obscure provision of what was then a very new law, the Refugee Act of 1980, which Jimmy Carter got to sign into law before the Reagan sweep of 1980 moved his administration out of town. Already some of his stuff—Joe was clear enough on the basics of it. He didn't need a whole lot of detail. He knew the basic dynamic of it and that it was not something that comported with his humanistic values or a sense of how government does behave.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now, after this meeting, did your group keep in contact with Joe Moakley? How did your group follow up on the progress of what Joe was actually doing for El Salvador?

**CROTTY:** Well, a lot of it was that Jim McGovern<sup>10</sup> became a contact person. And whether the chemistry between Jim and Joe was instantaneous or whether it was something—whether it bonded or developed over a period of time. But it seemed almost with every passing month that Joe’s confidence in Jim and Jim’s sort of ability to channel Joe’s public service spirit were just about exactly congruent. So Jim was a very easy person to keep in touch with and what was happening on this, although it ended up taking—I think it was eight years to finally become a law.

But it started with the Dear Colleague letter that Joe drafted [attachment D]. Probably within a few weeks of the meeting that we actually had with him in January of 1983 and year-by-year, the number of signatures on that Dear Colleague letter grew and grew. I think in the beginning it may have been like Joe plus five other people. A few years later, it was already over a hundred fellow members of Congress who were on this Dear Colleague letter. Although, again, these things weren’t going very far very fast because the Reagan gang was opposed to it because—well, to my mind it reflects a little bit to the latest adventures in the Middle East<sup>11</sup> which could go nowhere else, but there was almost a kind of master race mentality among the Reagan people. It was like you knew they saw themselves as so powerful, so important, so much smarter than anybody else in the world, that if they were going to deal with some of these conflicts it really didn’t matter because after all, superior minds like theirs did not need to listen to criticism. And it kept getting closer and closer to being kind of a land ground swell in Congress, and indeed it probably had more momentum in the U.S. House of Representatives and was meeting more resistance on the Senate side until 1990.

---

<sup>10</sup> James P. McGovern (1959- ), was a member of Moakley’s congressional staff from 1982 to 1996. .A Democrat, he has represented Massachusetts’ Third Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1997.

<sup>11</sup> In March of 2003, the United States Army led a military invasion of the country of Iraq. The mission was given the code name Operation Iraqi Freedom.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now U.S. participation in El Salvador, we had advisors on the ground; we were also training troops in the United States. Is this something that your group also brought to Joe Moakley, or how were you dealing with that?

**CROTTY:** I think that my general recollection, without having to refer to anything really specific, is that as Joe took on a piece of this larger issue, that the totality of it also became clearer and clearer for him, so he knew that the conflict there was generating more and more refugees; that these people really had been terrorized and their lives had been turned upside down. He really didn't need so much pushing from us, but I think really sort of more encouragement and support. It almost—right from the beginning, it didn't take any persuading. It was really more affirmation.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now, in 1989, six Jesuit priests were killed in El Salvador.<sup>12</sup> Were you still following the issue at that time, or had you moved on to something else? Was your group still involved with that, still speaking with Joe Moakley or Jim McGovern?

**CROTTY:** Well, I think—well, I know that CPPAX was still following this very much at the time, and at that point there was the international aspect of it and there was the domestic aspect of it. And what Joe finally got enacted into law was a fair treatment. Again, it was the resistance of the administration that refused to extend—they would not exercise the discretion available to them in the law, because as far as they were concerned, their party line was, Things are just fine in El Salvador; the people running the show there are our kind of people, and therefore they can do no wrong. And EVD would have recognized that people do have reason to fear persecution there, and that reflects a really not very popular or even very reputable government, that is generating this kind of a refugee flow.

I was probably more involved in CPPAX; other people were more involved in some other organization. But we were concerned about both what was happening in El Salvador and what

---

<sup>12</sup> On November 16, 1989, six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter were killed at the University of Central America in San Salvador.

was happening to the Salvadorans who had made their way to the United States. And we continued to remain in very close touch with Joe and Jim on this all the way through.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now in the letter, you don't only mention El Salvador; your group also mentions Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. How involved were you in those three countries as well? Did Joe take up any issues on those after your group met with him, or was it just El Salvador?

**CROTTY:** Well, of course, it was a regional situation and Joe's particular involvement on this was the domestic angle, and I'm trying to remember—I don't because EVD has to be on a country-by-country basis. Along the way he was certainly supportive of granting that relief, certainly Guatemalans as well. Curiously, and even to this day, the Nicaraguan thing, that became the odd flip side because the Nicaraguans—since the government in Nicaragua was something that the U.S. government didn't like all through the eighties. The military involvement in Nicaragua was to overthrow the Nicaraguan government, whereas the involvement in El Salvador and Guatemala were to prop up the governments against popular uprising. We were generating the illusion of popular uprising, the so-called Contras<sup>13</sup> in Nicaragua, and then we were supporting governments suppressing popular uprising in Guatemala and El Salvador.

And then Honduras is kind of a funny thing because that was more of a staging area. Like the Contras were running back and forth across the border in Honduras. And we were trying to seal the Honduran border from Salvadorans doing that, but were trying to keep the border open to Contras fleeing back and forth across the border, as a matter of the—basically the Reagan, and even the Bush policy on this. So it was a regional and interrelated conflict, but Joe's particular take—what he was really looking at was—what he committed himself to was basically refugee-like relief, under the Refugee Act of 1980, to Salvadorans, who clearly should have been treated as refugees. And yet the United States government, by certifying that there were no human

---

<sup>13</sup> Contras is a name given to the rebel groups that opposed Nicaragua's Sandinista Junta of National Reconstruction, which was the socialist political party that took control of Nicaragua's government following the 1979 overthrow of the corrupt Somoza regime.

rights problems and other similar absurdities, that people's recourse under the law was being denied to them here in the U.S.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now, as a group, did you ever discuss or have knowledge of the liberation theology<sup>14</sup> that was going on, that the Jesuit priests were teaching to the El Salvadorans?

**CROTTY:** I think we would have—I certainly had some awareness of it and knew something about Liberation Theology that partly was coming out of Brazil, too. I was—[during] my Peace Corps days in Brazil, there was this kind of grassroots gospel which was very much in evidence. And a lot of the clergy in Brazil were already a part of that in the 1960s. And so I—with that kind of as a backdrop, I knew that the Christian-based communities and all of that was certainly part of what was the expectation, not so much out of Marx, as out of the New Testament. The expectation of decent treatment and fairness and a kind of human-to-human equality, that was rooted in people's religious beliefs, or which was people were being shown that their religious beliefs were not just about the afterlife, but they had applications in the here and now as well.

And so certainly, we were aware of that. I don't think that—I don't know that it had much to do with—although no doubt it had something to do with some of the religious community's involvement. In the midst of all of this, too, I think it's important to note that Tip O'Neill<sup>15</sup>—who was just an extremely close colleague and friend to Joe Moakley—that Tip O'Neill, through some religious missionary people in his own family, was getting feedback about what was going on in Central America. And so some of these were perspectives that—from direct family contacts, I gather—I've heard Joe refer to this—that input was also consistent with what was coming from grassroots, it was consistent with what was coming from some of these refugees themselves, it was consistent with—that these different story lines corroborated one another.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now, you mentioned, just in passing right there, Tip O'Neill getting information from members of his family and whatnot. As far as the community goes, and there

---

<sup>14</sup> Liberation theology is a school of thought that focuses on using religious faith to combat poverty and oppression. It has been popular particularly among Latin American Catholics. (See <http://www.liberationtheology.org>)

<sup>15</sup> Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill (1912-1994), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts' Eleventh and, after redistricting, Eighth Congressional Districts in the United States House of Representatives from 1953 to 1987. He served as Speaker of the House of Representatives from 1977 to 1987.

were nine names listed here, were there more people involved? Were you getting information from other sources?

**CROTTY:** The Jamaica Plain Committee on Central America [JPCOCA] certainly had more than nine people. My guess is that it may have been thirty, forty, fifty people. It was fairly extensive. I was less involved; I think I went to one or two functions of theirs. They were good folks, but they had meeting schedules, CPPAX had meeting schedules, and my work involved meeting schedules, so there are only so many meetings that you can squeeze into a week or even a year. But the JPCOCA—which is down here for Dorothy Cox—who ended up adopting two refugee teenagers from El Salvador.

Comite Centroamericano was the same as the Committee on Central America, I guess, but some of these things—when you're seeing folks in different aspects, presumably some—actually I don't really know that, but Miguel Satut, at the time, was the executive director of Oficina Hispana.<sup>16</sup> I presume that some of the clients of Oficina were Central American refugees, although I can't recall now if they were specifically referred to as that, but it would make all kinds of sense. I assume that was happening, so that pieces of this panorama or little sectors of it were coming in or parts of the message were coming in from over many different wires.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now, CPPAX, you've mentioned that quite a few times, you being quite involved in that group. As a member of that group, did you—did they bring anything to Joe Moakley? Or were you just doing this locally in the Jamaica Plain group?

**CROTTY:** Well, CPPAX continued to do their regular—the idea was to try at least once a year to have a group of—to have a kind of multi-issue visit with every congressman, in which CPPAX had a significant-size membership. And as a way again of reinforcing that there are real bodies, real faces, real names, real people, real enthusiasm behind a range of issues. Now in some cases trying to persuade, or very often because of the nature of the Mass. Delegation, just reinforce and say, We know you're under pressures to turn around on this or to give ground, and,

---

<sup>16</sup> Oficina Hispana is an organization, located in downtown Boston, that provides English language training for non-English speakers, specifically Hispanics.

Please don't! And so those meetings continued and to the best of my knowledge I don't think that the group that met with Joe there on that day in January—I can't remember the specific date, but it would have been somewhere around early to mid-January, 1983.

I don't know that we, as a particular group—I continued to know and see everybody who was there that day, but we as a group I don't think ever assembled again to go and have another office meeting with Joe around these issues. Because, again, when he took it on he stayed with it. It was really more like, How's it going? How can we help?, and so forth, but he really didn't need—another thing I sort of recall about Joe is that he really often didn't want to talk very much about something, that it was like, Okay, we agree on that; okay, so we don't need to discuss that too much; I'm with you, you're with me on that. Let's set that one aside now, what do you have—what do we have that's new that needs to be worked out?

**WEYMOUTH:** Did you guys discuss any other issues with him besides this letter?

**CROTTY:** On that day with the group of people that were there, which included Felix Arroyo<sup>17</sup>, Miguel Satut was there that day, I believe Carol Pryor was, Ginny Vogel Zanger<sup>18</sup> was there, and that was the basic group that I can specifically remember, and yeah, I think there were just about five of us. That we—lost my train of thought there for a moment, but it was basically, each of us sort of knew—had a big picture on this. But we didn't—and actually it—maybe other folks in different combinations met with Joe again on this. I know a lot of it—I stayed in fairly close touch with Jim McGovern after this. I was on the verge of doing—trying to get myself like a mini-sabbatical. Nobody ever paid me for it, but I, every seven years, I try to take off and do something different. And that was 1983, that was my second mini-sabbatical, and I went off to Mexico, which I had never really visited before and went around Mexico for about six or seven weeks. Including down on the border, where there were some ad hoc Guatemalan refugee camps, right on the Mexico-Guatemalan border; and driving back from Texas, where my youngest brother lived at the time, I'd flown from Texas to Mexico to Guadalajara, and then left

---

<sup>17</sup> Felix D. Arroyo is a Boston native who has worked for the City in several capacities related to education, violence prevention, and human rights. He served as an at-large councilor on the Boston City Council from 2003 to 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Carol Pryor and Virginia Vogel Zanger were both members of the Jamaica Plain Committee on Central American, or JPCOCA.

from Mérida back to Houston, Texas. Visited my youngest brother again, and then drove through Washington back.

That was the first time I'd met Jim, face-to-face. I believe this would have been June of 1983, and I told him some of the things I had learned in Mexico, about the Central American refugee situation, although, having somewhat more to do with Guatemalans than Salvadorans, because Mexico doesn't share a border with El Salvador. But that was—but sitting in Joe's office, and briefing Jim a bit on what I'd seen and what people told me, in Mexico down in Chiapas state. And from that face-to-face encounter, gauging the intelligence and deep sincerity with which he was involved in this and committed to it, that I didn't so much need to talk with Joe about this. Although, when I'd seen him, occasionally he would reinforce this some; but the point person on this, for me, was Jim, because Joe had lots of people tugging on his sleeve, and if Jim was the best way to channel the message then that's fine. I didn't need to have the celebrity so much as I just needed to be able to make sure that we were getting the backflow of communication with him.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now, you said that there were things you learned while you were down in Mexico; could you elaborate on those a little bit? What did you see? What were you hearing from the people down there? I know you said it was a lot—a majority was from Guatemala, but what was going on at the time down there?

**CROTTY:** I spoke with—there were a couple of Mexicans who were involved in refugee work. I had a meeting with a very, very solid guy in Mexico City. He put me in contact with somebody who was working for the UN High Commission for Refugees, although he was also Mexican—down in the last, big city in Mexico, on the Pan American Highway, before you get to the Guatemalan border. And it was really curious—I remember sort of how nervous he was, because this friend had given me his name and how to get in contact with him. So he accepted that this was the right person to talk to, but he was really concerned about who might see him and who might overhear him. Even though all he was doing was really exchanging facts. And he gave me an idea of how to go, and I had rented a car at that point in my trip, and he gave me the idea of how to go and view these refugee camps; although you could get in trouble if you got

out and tried to walk around, because as far as the Mexican government was concerned, they weren't exactly there. They were sort of there, but not there at the same time. There was no official character to them, and they certainly didn't want to encourage more spontaneous flight across the border into Mexico from Guatemala.

And so I drove along the border and drove through a couple of these camps, and they were just all very—almost like shantytowns. People would just chop down the wood and put together some materials, and obviously there was no regular sanitation, there was no infrastructure there, and it was still—I'm still sort of haunted by the image sort of coming in, and looking out the side window and then watching it recede in the rearview mirror as I just sort of slowly drove through this. It was on either side of this highway that was parallel to the border, and it was clear this was a desperate situation and nobody had a handle on it.

And as far as the United States government was concerned, i.e. the Reagan administration, it's like, Oh, this isn't a problem. Anybody who went—got anywhere close to it, knew this was a terrible problem. This was—this is tragic; people are dying, people are bleeding, awful stories coming out of Guatemala. Anyways, it was some of that firsthand account, and I think that was probably still in Jim's approximate first six or nine months on Joe's staff, of establishing the person to whom you can tell this stuff, and it will sink in, and it will be retained, and it will become part of an action plan.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now, you said the man was nervous telling you what was going on.

**CROTTY:** Uh-huh.

**WEYMOUTH:** And how did he do this? Was he nervous for—about the United States, or was he nervous about—?

**CROTTY:** Because the whole thing was so—it was so volatile, it was so touchy, it was so hypersensitive that Mexico on the one hand wanted to be helpful and on the other hand it didn't want to get itself overcommitted. On the one hand it wanted to offer some refuge to people on

the border; on the other hand, it didn't want to have some conflict with Guatemala, because I think there—I sort of haven't thought about this for a long time—there had actually been—there were accounts of incidents that were officially denied by both governments; but there were accounts of the Guatemalan army coming over into Mexican territory, and Mexico is the powerhouse nation of Central America. And the idea of little Guatemala, an army that, feeling with that impunity, it could enter into Mexican sovereign territory to attack its enemies that had simply—that had thought they could find some sanctuary across the border. Now, these were not really guerillas, these were just people who were basically ethnic Mayan, highland Mayan Indians. Who were—among other things, who were non-persons in the eyes of Guatemala City regime, basically the military and the oligarch government that ruled there.

**WEYMOUTH:** As far as these two people go, do you remember their names or—?

**CROTTY:** Oh, geez. I probably got that in notes somewhere. My meeting with the fellow who was—it was in Comitán [Mexico]—in Comitán, C-O-M-I-T-A, an accent over the A,-N, and I was—and the guy in Mexico City was somebody that was a referral I got from the American Friends Service—excuse me, Unitarian Universalists. The UU Service Committee here in Boston, somebody who was working on Central American stuff at the time. He knew the fellow in Mexico City, and then again, this is nearly twenty years ago to the day. Within a few weeks—it was twenty years ago about this time of the year, and so I'm—as high a regards as I have for each of these individuals, I met each of them once; I think I had lunch in Mexico City with one guy, and I think we sort of had like a light lunch. And [the man from] Comitán was the other fellow, and that was the one and only time I had ever seen them. Although, I sort of remember their presence because they were so intense, and very, very heavy-duty people, but it was—but I can't for the life of me remember the—it may come to me at about 11:30 tonight, but I can't off-hand remember either of them.

**WEYMOUTH:** What strikes me as strange—you brought up Mexico and the refugees from Guatemala. Mexico actually recognized the guerillas in El Salvador, and did they have any recognition of—was there any recognition of the refugees coming over from Guatemala, as being political refugees or—?

**CROTTY:** Look, this is the touchy thing, and Mexico at various times—I also ran into somebody, I believe—God, I cannot recall now whether he was sort of in this refugee condition—and I ended up giving him money, enough money for like a real meal or something. He approached me and he just happened to approach me in a big park, I think it was Chapultepec Park, in Mexico City; and again, same time, same trip. And he was just—he just looked—I don't know how old he was; he looked like sixty years old. He was probably a lot younger than that. But he just looked like all the vitality was drained out of him and he was—I think he was living in a monastery, and he was in this kind of looking-glass world. That obviously, he was a real person, but he couldn't really proceed through Mexico, because Mexico wouldn't support that. Mexico on the other hand wasn't going to force him back, but he also needed to keep a low profile because Mexico didn't want any trouble. And so he basically was left living off of charity at this monastery, and occasionally seeing if he could get some additional charity from telling his story to the occasional stranger like me, and that was it. He was just in this time warp situation and I—and there were enough accounts that there were times when Mexico was being more rigid and they thought they were aggravating their Central American neighbors, to the south.

Particularly Guatemala—they would crack down and then they would stop people, and they would arrest people for being in Mexico and without authorization. And then if all other times when things were heating up or if the government somehow were in a—if it felt more sympathetic that week it would have let people pass rather unimpeded, and right on across the border into the United States. If they were able to, the government was not in a position to facilitate that, but they would not do anything to oppose it. But again, occasionally they'd clench their—they'd tighten their grip and occasionally they'd loosen their grip. And they—it was almost impossible to predict what attitude—that kind of strict, easy, strict, easy mode Mexico would be into toward these people who really were fleeing persecution.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now, you mentioned you'd been to Brazil—

**CROTTY:** Uh-huh.

**WEYMOUTH:** —South America, you've been to Mexico, obviously in Central America. Did you ever have the opportunity to go to any one of these four countries here: El Salvador, Nicaragua—

**CROTTY:** Okay. I probably stepped across the border into Guatemala when I was—because that was another lesson down there is that you can't see—there are no lines, there are no fences, there's nothing whatsoever, it's just like, Well, let's see, Mexico is sort of over here and Guatemala is sort of over here, and you could be in either one at this moment because there's nothing to show you which is which. But I've never—I'd be interested in visiting any of them at some time or another, but no, there was nothing in my work, and no real opportunities that presented themselves to go to any one of those places and who knows; maybe yet, sometime in the future.

I almost went to Nicaragua once on earthquake relief, in 1976, because I was in between jobs and I was available to do something like this, and I think that may have been Unitarian Universalist. Because I mentioned it to somebody who was doing their international development thing and the Nicaraguan earthquake which eventually—which finally was the—that's finally what caused the Somozas to be replaced by the Sandinistas, because the kind of corruption that went on after the 1970—I believe it was the early 1976 earthquake, that finally destroyed peoples' idea that the Somozas' dictatorship, which had been multigenerational at that point. Well maybe not quite that; it had been around for nearly fifty years, and they had no longer—they were disgusted with them. They had no more confidence in it, and it made it possible for, in the late seventies, finally for the Sandinistas to triumph over the Somozas' regime, which then produced the whole Contra struggle for the next decade.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> The Somoza regime was a political dynasty in Nicaragua that was in power for over forty years. Anastasio Somoza García of the Liberal Nationalist party became president in 1937, and his two sons also became presidents. His second son, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, became president in 1967, but his popularity waned throughout the 1970s as government corruption, especially involving aid money following a 1972 earthquake, became more apparent. He resigned in 1979, and the government was taken over by the Sandinistas, who were members of the socialist Sandinista National Liberation Front.

**WEYMOUTH:** Now, after your trip to Mexico, you came up, you spoke with Jim McGovern—obviously I'm sure that Joe Moakley spoke with Jim as well after that—in the end, as far as what Joe did for El Salvador, you kept track of that it sounds like. Were you pleased with what he did?

**CROTTY:** A lot through the eighties from my human services work involving—continuing to involve refugees, in the refugees and immigrants, and I came to think—I come to think of refugees as a special category within the general immigrant category. They are obviously immigrants, but they are immigrants under great duress. So through that and through some other things, I continued to follow this because it became more and more a part of a broader agenda of immigrant advocates, some based in Washington and others scattered around. Well, not even scattered—others forming a network around the country.

And so I—so that became my yet additional vantage point on what was happening around—and then I co-founded—in fact, the first real benefit we ever did for the Mass. Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition—co-founded that in 1986-87, and the first real benefit that we did was a tribute to Joe Moakley for his Salvadoran refugee work. The event—ended up calling that An Evening with Special Friends, but basically Joe Moakley was the special friend. I'm pretty sure that Jim was there too, and so the friends, plural, might have been a reference to Jim, too. He was there, in his staffing role, and so he—we had—it was very nice, it was very well attended, and we used what was then kind of a Back Bay mansion location of the International Institute, just because it really was a big mansion and so it had a couple of big reception rooms, and it was a good space for this. And he, on that occasion—and on one other occasion, which was really more a fundraiser for a one staff person effort to get the Moakley Bill enacted into law a little bit later—but that was a typical case where he was just so humble and self-effacing about the whole thing, and it was like, “I really appreciate the fact that you're honoring me, but it just seemed like the right thing to do and that's why I did it. And when I heard about this, I couldn't say no.” And so that was—and he seemed genuinely pleased and very typically as he had over the years, sort of taking a step aside and looking at himself and what he considered a very improbable role of being a leader on some issue of international consequence. Cause he basically saw himself as a bread-and-butter, domestic kind of guy.

**WEYMOUTH:** Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition—you say you founded that?

**CROTTY:** Yeah, it was—yeah, along with some other people, but it was coming out of the, when the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 [IRCA] finally became law, in 1986, it had been going through some—a long gestation period previous years, and some people had met and talked about how we really needed to have a Massachusetts statewide advocacy group that could be speaking about these issues specifically to our Washington delegation. And when IRCA became law then it was pretty clear that, Okay, now there really has to be a group because this involves workplace authorization. People now have to show employment authorization cards when they go and get jobs, and employers are now responsible in some ways for verifying that all of their employees are authorized to work in the United States. It was—this was the immigration control part, and it also—that had the effect of possibly squeezing people out who needed someone to support themselves, even though they were temporary—at least temporary refugees.

And the Moakley Bill might have been—as I recall, the Moakley Bill might have been a provision within that omnibus piece of legislation, but Joe’s provision for Salvadorans got dropped out once again, in 1986. Even though at this time it really had quite a bit of momentum, and it was probably up around the hundred-plus colleague signatures, for people who were really co-sponsors in the House. But it was—I don’t know if we quite got to the point at that point—I don’t know if it had been enacted. It may be that—it probably was, I think, at the point that we did the event recognizing him; it was probably around the fifth anniversary of MIRA [Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition], so finally the Moakley Bill would have gotten into law at that point. And it was probably right around 1991.<sup>20</sup> I’ve got that somewhere in my files, too.

---

<sup>20</sup> Starting in 1983, Congressman Moakley introduced legislation to protect Salvadorans in the U.S. using the “Extended Voluntary Departure” provision that allowed a temporary stay of deportation and work authorization. Moakley was finally able to pass legislation that granted Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Salvadorans in the Immigration Act of 1990 (PL. 101-649). TPS grants temporary legal residency and work authorization to immigrants fleeing civil wars, natural disasters or other conditions in their home country for a set period of time. In El Salvador’s case, TPS has been extended several times since 1990. The TPS designation has been used by other

But it was—but this particular objective, although it took seven years from the beginning to the end—but it was Joe Moakley’s leverage, at that point basically chairing the Rules Committee,<sup>21</sup> that said in 1990 there was another big omnibus immigration reform act that was going through, and Joe took a really firm line and said, “I’ve been at this”—you know, words to this effect,—“I’ve been at this for seven years now, you know, if this bill—I’m sitting in this seat and I can craft the rule for whether—for how difficult or easy it is for this to go through the House of Representatives. If this is not a part of this bill, this bill is not going to become a law.” And basically Alan Simpson,<sup>22</sup> the very curmudgeonly senator from Wyoming who chaired the Senate Immigration Subcommittee, basically ended up—he tried to bluff Joe to back down, and he ended up having to be the one to back down, because Joe was holding more cards than he was. He wanted a lot of things; Simpson wanted a lot of things in this bill, and Joe said, “You know, I’m tired of waiting after seven years. Either my Salvadorans are going to be in this bill or this bill is not going to be law.”

**WEYMOUTH:** You stated that the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition was MIRA for short, and while we had the tape off you said that *mira* was the Spanish imperative for look?

**CROTTY:** Yeah, for look. *Mirar*, to look at—and if you say—if you’re out with someone and you say *mira* it means look at that over there. Sort of calling attention—calling someone’s attention to something.

**WEYMOUTH:** And just for tape reasons, could you spell both of those? *Mira* is M-I-R-A or—  
?

---

countries experiencing civil unrest and is administered by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). (See <http://www.uscis.gov>.)

<sup>21</sup> The House Rules Committee is responsible for the scheduling of bills for discussion in the House of Representatives. According to the Rules Committee website, “bills are scheduled by means of special rules from the Rules Committee that bestow upon legislation priority status for consideration in the House and establish procedures for their debate and amendment.” (See <http://www.rules.house.gov/>) Congressman Moakley was a member of the House Rules Committee from 1975 to 2001 and served as its chairman from 1989 to 1995.

<sup>22</sup> Alan K. Simpson (1931- ), a Republican, represented Wyoming in the U.S. Senate from 1979 to 1997.

**CROTTY:** Well the infinitive verb form is M-I-R-A-R, and *mira*, again the imperative form, is M-I-R-A, as Mass. Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy.

**WEYMOUTH:** I'd like to thank you, Ed, for your time. At this point in the interview if you would like to say something, please feel free.

**CROTTY:** An overarching thought is what a great sort of mutual pleasure and honor it was to have worked with Joe on this. It was—from the moment that the thought crystallized, it took a long and very unpredictable course. But it was really—it was interesting and very gratifying over the years to see how pleased Joe was at the extra dimension that this added to his public service career. Always being a kind of lunch bucket instead of just basic nuts and bolts issues guy, and that this was one thing that took this entire little country, and he just always seemed so enchanted and bemused by the idea that he of all people, this congressman from South Boston, had become this international figure with regard to this one little country. Which also became the basis for him doing the investigation. This was his entrée to his Salvadoran sort of bonding experience that made him the logical person then to investigate the assassination of the Jesuits and the housekeeper and daughter.<sup>23</sup> When that atrocity occurred in 1989—because at that time, at that point he had six years worth of roots in the Salvadoran issue, and again in particular the people-to-people aspect of it. And it was—I'm just pleased to have been a part of having sort of helped open the door through which he so graciously and willingly walked through. And in the course of things became really—became a kind of national hero to the people of El Salvador. And he's a very worthy national hero for them.

## **END OF INTERVIEW**

---

<sup>23</sup> In December of 1989, Speaker of the House Thomas S. Foley appointed Moakley as chairman of a committee to investigate the November 16, 1989, murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter at the University of Central America in San Salvador. The committee is commonly referred to as the Speaker's Task Force on El Salvador or the Moakley Commission.

## **OH-006 Attachments**

- Attachment A** December 13, 1982, letter from concerned citizens to Moakley
- Attachment B** Oxfam America Justice for All Campaign Pledge Sheet (n.d.)
- Attachment C** Letter accompanying pledge sheet re: U.S. policy in Central American (n.d.)
- Attachment D** April 28, 1983, letter from Moakley to the U.S. attorney general, with colleague names attached