

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Oral History Project

Christina Mora

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Jennifer Ramirez and Andrea Arias

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Unofficial transcript generated by Panopto captioning services; edited by Elyse Fox (CSUS)

Q Please tell us your full name and date of birth.

[00:00:10]

Christina Mora Maria Christina Mora.

Q Okay.

[00:00:14]

Mora And where I'm from?

Q Your date of birth.

[00:00:16]

Mora 12/21/53.

Q Also, are you married?

[00:00:21]

Mora No. I was, and I'm single now. But I'm divorced.

Q Any children?

[00:00:25]

Mora No.

Q Great. Okay. So, we'll get started with some background now. So, now where were you born and raised?

[00:00:38]

Mora I was born in Texas, Amarillo, Texas, but I was pretty much raised both places because my dad worked for the railroad.

Q Okay.

[00:00:46]

Mora So we'd go back every summer, Christmas, so I'd be there during those breaks, but I was also here during the, you know, school year and most of the year. So it was almost like what four months over there and, you know, eight months over here. So I'm real close to my family still in Texas.

Q That's nice. So you have like a little vacation home kind of thing.

[laughter]

[00:01:06]

Mora No. I don't want live there. I was born there.

Q Then what did your parents do for a living?

[00:01:13]

Mora My mother, my father was, he was from Mexico. He was from Metrigan [phonetic], Mexico.

He was from Metrigan, Mexico, and he had, he was a miner. He worked in, the miners up in the Sierra Madre, and there was a mining accident. He was a foreman, and his brother and him worked there, and his brother, there was a cave-in, and his brother was there in the cave, and they couldn't bring him out of the mines. They couldn't bring him out. So he said he worked for two days to try to dig him out, and then they couldn't bring him out so -- and that was the last of his family. So he said he just got on his horse and got into the federal program and came to Texas.

And so he was there in the railroad, he came to work on the railroad there in Texas and then came here to California to get a job.

So he got a job here in Sacramento with the Southern Pacific. And my mother worked as a waitress in Texas when she was in Texas, and then she came here, and she worked in the cannery.

Q Oh, wow. Did you, how many brothers and sisters do you have?

[00:02:28]

Mora I have one each, a brother and a sister. I'm the youngest.

Q Okay. And then, can you please describe your experiences as a child or in your youth in your family and neighborhood.

[00:02:42]

Mora When my dad came back here -- I was born in Texas, and my dad had already lived here, and my mom lived here, but my mom went back to have us, have me, so when she got back here, we lived in the projects, and the projects don't exist anymore. Everything else does. You know where the south side soccer field is?

Q I'm sorry, I'm not familiar with that.

[00:03:01]

Mora Oh, anyway, it's right on Broadway, and the projects were right there where the soccer field was. And we lived right on the corner. Anyway, my dad finally saved enough money to buy a house, and he bought a house in Oak Park.

When we moved to Oak Park, the neighborhood was real diverse. We had Mexicanos. We had Japonesas, Blacks, Whites, everybody. It was really, really mixed, and at some point, probably in the late '60s, there was white flight. So it became almost the black neighborhood, you know, a lot of whites moved out. Blacks, low income moved in.

I went to school at one of the elementary schools before the freeway was built, so it was right in what they call Curtis Park now, nice area. And I used to go there.

So it was, I mean I was in the Brownies. I was in the Girl Scouts. I don't recall any racism at all because we were, when we used to go to each other's houses, all the girls and stuff, then went to junior high. It was okay, but my dad, as my dad raised us, he talked about the social injustices, not only in Mexico but here, he made us real aware about, you know, we need to vote. We need to register. We need to know what's going on in the community, you know, that type of stuff.

So he was always like reading papers to us, or he'd read the paper and tell us what was going on when we were younger. Very much a person who thought that myself and my sisters, women, we should know how to protect ourselves and support ourselves, that education would do that. So he really pushed me for that.

My mother, of course, she worked in the cannery, but she was very smart, real artistic, and she taught us, you know, how to do the cooking and the cleaning and all that. And it wasn't so much because you're a girl, because she taught my brother as well, but that both of them, but you need to take care of yourself, and you can't depend on people sometimes, and you have to be able to do it yourself.

And I learned how to change, I wanted to learn how to drive, and my dad said, we'll let's teach you how to change oil and change tires. And he literally took all the tires off the car, and he made me change the oil and put them back on. And you know, learning the type of car to drive, I had to learn how to drive a manual before I drove an automatic.

Q Wow.

[00:05:30]

Mora So, he taught me how to box when I was 12. He said you'll get in a fight because you can fight, he goes, to protect yourself, but never start it. You can never start the fight, but you need to be able to finish it. So, I, and talked about, you know, just a real philosopher, telling me a lot of stuff that I needed to do to be a well-rounded person, talked to me about sex when I was -- at 12 years old, you know that, you know what, you know, men want and this and that and the other. You know, and I'm just like, oh, okay. You know, just all the things that I don't think that young women know that you just, just don't be sexual just to be sexual but, you know, because you love somebody. If you love somebody, it'll be okay, but if you don't, then it's just about nothing.

And so he, you know, real philosophical as far as I'm concerned, and my mother, you know, she'd like cringe, but she was, all what are you talking about? You know, his thing was they need to know, they need to know these type of things.

So, you know, he never hit us. My mother used to hit us, but he never hit us. But, you know, I know how to butcher goats and lambs because he would make meals for, you know, like parties and stuff they'd have. So, he'd bring the animals home, and you know, he'd teach us how to kill them and butcher them and cook all the food that's inside of them. We ate blood and all that stuff.

So it was really, I thought, real well-rounded family life. He drank a lot, but he wasn't violent with us or my mother that I remember. Real loving. But he was also very pragmatic. If something happens, if you do something, there's going to be a consequence one way or another. So watch what you're doing and about who you hung around with. He never told us not to hang around with somebody, but he'd always say tell me who you're with, and I'll tell you who you are, so they're kind of like, oh okay.

So I have to really, I think I'm well-rounded, and it taught me to give. If you want to get, you need to give. So, do a lot of the work in the community, volunteer, because him and my mom volunteered a lot so. I think that's where I, it started, so. A lot of friends, I have a lot of friends of different ethnic groups and what not.

Q That's great. Wow. That's so exciting. Okay. So were you a felito, were you part of the Mexican American Education Project?

[00:07:58]

Mora No.

Q Did you know about their missions [inaudible].

[00:08:02]

Mora I, kind of, and I knew some of them, some of the people, Richard [inaudible] and a few other people that I knew that were in the program, but no. I knew they were doing stuff in the community, but I didn't know enough who work in the program at all.

Q Okay, that's great. Okay. And then you said that you were like very like surrounded by all these different cultures and ethnic groups and all that, so I guess my next question is did you study, did your study of cultural anthropology or your knowledge of cultural issues influence your involvement and participation in the Movimiento Chicano.

[00:08:51]

Mora Yeah. I think a little bit. You know, the cultural, a lot of the cultural things are what my dad and mom taught me about being a Mexicana and about being, about being involved in the U.S. culture as well but never to forget who I was. And then the other people around me that I met through high school, and I think that's where I learned more, because the Vietnam War was happening then. So doing those type of things, meeting a lot of people, different people, and embracing them.

There was, like I said, a lot of different cultures in my, on my block. There was a man that opened [inaudible] Japanese little store, and I was his employee because I was watching all the kids so they wouldn't steal. But just learning the different things. You know, my mom, too, the other neighbors became my mom's good friends, and they were African American. So we embraced that.

My dad was the repairman on the block. Everybody who had anything broken, they would come to have him fix it. And then just in junior high school learning the different groups, the Asians and the blacks and the Latinos and really seeing a difference, and I think that was the first time that from junior high, elementary school to junior high school, and I think it was in ninth grade, where I really saw a difference, that I'd really, that somebody just saw me as a Mexican, not as, you know, because all the other years it was just Christina.

All the kids hung around with each other, all the different groups, but when I got in junior high, it was about, somebody said something, and it was like, oh, yeah, I am Mexican. And it was okay, but then you started hearing the little comments because of the, the Chicano Movement was really starting to gain ground.

Q Okay.

[00:10:35]

Mora And it was real interesting, and yeah, I think all my, the different groups and the anthropology, cultural anthropology, I think it did make me look at things different, and my father would make me look at things different, and the different people that I met, elders, that would, I would look at things different. I had my godmother; her daughter was married to a black man. And that was, back then, that was like in the early '60s, and that was no, you know, you're not supposed to do that. But I didn't see a difference. My family didn't see a difference.

Some of the things that my dad, there was two words we couldn't use in the house or call anybody, and it was to use the n-word or to use [inaudible]. He would just flip out, and he would tell us things that you don't know what, you don't even know who you are, you've never been to Mexico, so you don't really know who you are. So it was about learning who the, all the different cultures. He goes how do you know what these people, you know, what they've been through. You don't know what they've been through. I remember somebody said it, some bunch of kids and one of the women, the mothers on the block, somebody used the n-word, and she made them go look it up, and then she made us all sit down, and she explained it to us what it was. It was a really bad word and stuff. So it was, I think, and she was Hawaiian, so I think it was really interesting, a life that I led and the different people that taught me stuff. So, yeah, I think there was an influence of all the different cultures on who I am today.

Q Right. So how did that influence you though to partake in the Chicano Movement?

[00:12:25]

Mora Learning the inequities that we have. Also learning the things that, who we are. I think, I took a cultural anthropology class with Sam Rios at Sac State, and I mean my dad would tell me how great we were and [inaudible] culture and stuff, and he would talk about, then I would see the things that my dad could do. And he trained horses and did all this stuff. So I could see and I saw the intelligence, but as I

said, after I got out of high school, that was when the, or after junior high, the racist, all the racist remarks and, you know, you guys aren't any good, and you're this and that and the other and stuff. So, I think when I took that class it really opened my eyes to look how great we are, what we've done, you know, how we've created this not only Mexico but this world and the United States. We had a big impact on it, but that's never shown in anything.

When I was at Sac City, I graduated from here, I was, I started, my dad would encourage me. The things I could do, he was real strict, I couldn't go anywhere, but the things I could do, as long as it was associated with the college, I could come, I could do anything as long as it was associated with the college. And he wanted me to participate because he understood that that was my way of giving back, and that was also his way of, that he taught me that I needed to give back.

But it was real, I don't know, it was just real, a lot of things that impacted my life with the things I did and who I am, the people that I meet, everybody that I meet. A lot of the things that I see that, and to this day, and I saw back then after taking some of the classes, but now, I still look, if there's some movie and I see at the theater, I wait to see all the listings, you know, the screen, who did what, are they Latinos in there. You know, are they, if somebody did something, you know, what are they? Are they Latinos? Are they Mexican Americans or are they Cubans or are they what? Those type of things, to see how far we've come, and I will share that with individuals.

Some of things that I do, I still mentor students, and it's real important to me is to mentor a student. I worked with a lot of organizations that work with youth.

Q Okay. Yeah, I know, it's interesting to look and see like, oh, my last name.

[00:15:08]

Mora I mean just anybody. They just, somebody, what was his name? Juan Carlos Besear [phonetic] or something, he's from Spain and, you know, or Spanish and Indian, but he just found a DNA about how people, to help people with, I forget what the other, what exactly what it was, but you know, and I do, I look anything up. If I see something Latino name, I'll look it up and who are you, a lot of notables that, you know, what are the things that we've done. And to share that because I don't think we know as groups that look at how successful we are.

I was the director of MESA, the Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement Program, and I was so proud of all those kids, you know, that they would do, they were farm workers and gang bangers and somebody talked to them, and they became doctors and lawyers and astrophysicists and all that. So it's really interesting. And I think it's something we all need to do, we all need to understand.

Q Definitely. That's really great. Do you remember any specific examples or things that happened that attracted you towards the Chicano movement?

[00:16:25]

Mora Cesar Chavez. He used to -- I was at Sac High at the time, and I did some of the marches with him.

Q Oh.

[00:16:31]

Mora So we closed down Safeway because we were protesting the boycott. Like I said, my dad was real strict, but there were certain things that was related to school I could go. We started doing, one of the, our high school student teacher was him -- I believe they were in the program, but they became student teachers, and we started doing plays and stuff at the high school. And Sacramento High and Sac High, the Sac High and the [inaudible] were probably the inner-city schools that everybody went to or wanted to go to.

So we started doing plays and fashion shows and stuff and really understanding our culture, but then the riots started to break out. So it was about that and about why we're fighting. Not only the Vietnam War but more about us, you know, what we've achieved or haven't achieved, and why haven't we done that. Was it something that, we created? I think that probably the getting in with Cesar Chavez, doing the marches probably really kept me in there, pushing me, and then my dad on the other side saying, okay, you can do this because it's for a good purpose, to understand who you are. Because he always used to tell me, if you don't know where you're from, you'll never know who you are.

Q Exactly. Okay, great. And how about like other Mexicans, Mexicans, Hispanics, Latinos, how did they react to the terms Chicano, Chicano Movement?

[00:18:06]

Mora Ooh. I'm from Texas, as I mentioned. Most of my cousins are republicans.

Q Oh?

[00:18:12]

Mora Eek, I know. I was like [inaudible]. I laugh because we, we'll go back and forth during the elections and stuff. They call themselves Spanish. So when I was over here with my, well, our family, my brother, my sister, and myself, and then my sister-in-law, my brother's in-laws, his kid, her, sister-in-law, my ex-sister-in-law, her sisters and brothers were starting to get into, at least one of them was starting to get into it also.

Q Oh.

[00:18:45]

Mora So we would go to family functions, and we'd talk about Chicanos. And all you guys are just radicals, and you guys are trying to start fights and blah blah blah. And the one that I was really shocked that backed me up was my father, and he would talk about, no, you guys don't know what you're talking about. Listen to them. You got to listen to see what they're talking about. And then people in school, there was a lot of people that I went to high school with didn't go to college, didn't get into that. They got married. They did all kinds of other things but not get into, and I think at that time you had to go into the educational field almost to understand that movement. And they were like, oh, okay, whatever, Chris. And I would really push them to, oh, let's go to this march or let's go to that, and they were like, no, let's go to this party. And so I was like, well, there's going to be a party afterwards. Let's go to the march.

So it was real interesting the different people, but again, like I said, my father and mother, they were the ones that like, okay, you're doing what you're supposed to. You're not getting in trouble, and you're learning something, and you're helping other people.

Q That's great. They encouraged you.

[00:19:57]

Mora Yeah, and my, but my cousins and stuff, they were like, oh that person from California. They would, if you know any Texans, they have sayings that you don't want to hear all the time, but.

Q Also during that time did you know about the Civil Rights Movement?

[00:20:15]

Mora Yeah, it, again, was during the riots, also during that time, we had at Sac High, we had riots, civil rights riots at our school, and I think our school was probably the only one that really did it. And they closed it down and stuff, and there were fights, and they called the cops and all that. But it was, it was real interesting to see, and I, at one of the days that they had it, I remember these two Chicanos or Latinos, jumped an Asian guy, and I got so pissed off, I was like what the hell are you guys doing? You don't even know who you're fighting. You're just looking to fight, and me and another friend went over there and, you know, started yelling at them, and they got off of them and stuff. But it was just, and that's when I started looking at, you know, make sure that you know what you're fighting about. Don't just join the group just so you can punch somebody out. Know what you're doing there and understanding, and that was something that we had to teach the others. And I was, like I said, my dad had a real big influence on me, and he, when he found out that, he said, well, did you get in any fights? Did you, and I was like, no, because he, his thing was, I taught you how to fight, but don't ever start a fight.

So it was really that injustices not only of the Civil Rights Movement or the Chicano Movement or any of that, Vietnam, it was what's right and wrong, what's right and wrong. And so a lot of times I would see things or hear things, and then I'd go kind of try to research it to see what it really is, what are we fighting for, you know.

Q What's the purpose behind it all.

[00:21:55]

Mora Not just, yeah, not just to fight. You know, Vietnam, and I have friends that were in Vietnam, my family members, but what was the fight really was because I, you know, I thought, oh yeah, the United States going over there, and we're going to beat everybody up.

Q Yeah.

[00:22:09]

Mora But it was, what was that war really about? You know, was there a need for it. And I'm coming to find out there really isn't a need for sometimes the fights, you know, these wars that kills millions of people and ruin them emotionally and possibly physically too.

Q Oh, yeah. Definitely. Did your involvement in the Chicano Movement change you personally?

[00:22:35]

Mora Yeah. As I mentioned, I started getting involved with a lot of organizations, different groups. I was MEChA. I was the first woman female MEChA president here at Sac City, so we got involved in a lot of things, and at that time you did more social things. You know, with the MEChA they were doing stuff more social type things, you know, do the Cinco de Mayo celebrate, 16th of September. And when I got in there it was about going in and doing stuff, and I remember one of the classes that was trying to get started was a Chicano psychology class with one of the professors, Kevin Ramirez. And we went and protested. I was like, let's go to the President's office. So, we went and talked to them, and they did the class. You know, we wound up having the class offered and a few other things, but it was also not only the social things but looking at what we were doing.

I was involved the Chicanito Science Project at Washington Neighborhood Center. I was in school here, so I became a tutor. Then I became a President of the Washington Neighborhood Center years later. Then LULAC, I was the vice president of LULAC. I was the director of the Mesa Program. So, yes, everything I did was the influence of the Chicano Movement made me want to do everything I was connected to personally and hopefully in my job was to make sure there was equity, that you know, what are we doing to make ourselves better?

In regards to jobs, all the jobs I did, you know, I wanted to do policy, and I forget what professor. I think it was a professor here, talked about, you know, you bring yourself up, but you have to bring somebody else up. And he talked about doing policy. And Joe said, and I talked about it, because I took a class from here about doing policy, and so all my jobs that I've done, I've tried to get onto where we're doing policy, to ensure that that policy that's written affects everybody equally, because there's policy written that will eliminate some people out of the process. So, and that's what I tell, you know, young people. Make sure if you're going to do something, do it and make sure that you look at the policy issues, you know, the law that's behind it. Do you need to change that?

I recently had a job assignment of overseeing the student, the California Student Senate, and there are the executive students sitting at the state level, and I remember there was about, and I really proud to see the Latinos in there. There was 30 students. There was probably about 10 of them were Latinos, which I really liked the representation. And some of the kids, the people [inaudible] students came up, and they were talking. They go, we want something with ethnic studies issue on here. And I said, no, no, no. You want to sit on the policies that affect all the Latinos. And they go -- and then I had to explain to them. I said you, you're going to write a policy that affects people, you make sure that you're talking about your people to that, that policy is written so it'll embrace everybody.

And they, I don't think they had ever heard it before, and they were AB940 students or they were from like San Diego. So they didn't know that type of politics. They were in very political positions, but they didn't understand that it was the policy piece that they had to change and be involved in. Now they've moved on and graduated from a community college. They're at Berkeley and UCLA and USC.

Q Okay.

[00:26:09]

Mora And it's really great to see them, and they're sitting on like the student senate positions as well there in their colleges. So it's really nice.

Q That's really great. So, to our next question, how do you think the Chicanos influenced or played a part in the movimiento?

[00:26:29]

Mora Oh, my God. Guys can't do anything without us.

Q Yeah.

[laughter]

[00:26:34]

Mora You know, the things that I got involved with, we were side by side. There are a few men that would like, what are you doing here, you know, and kind of move you back. But the people that I looked at were like Dolores Huerta, Isabelle Hernandez, a professor at Sac State. So a lot of people that I, women that I knew that were older than me, they were, you know, I was coming behind them. And they stood side by side by people.

My mother and father, that, you know, they were partners. So it wasn't anything, but there was, you know, my issues sometimes with some of the men that I ran into about them not seeing that equality. And one guy actually in the psychology class, I took the class, and this guy told me that, what did he tell me? We were talking about relationships. And he goes, and he turned around and in front of everybody, there was about 30 students, he goes, you need to be home in -- oh, sorry, that's my phone.

Is that mine? I think it is.

Could you ask the question again?

Q Yes. No worries. So, what role do you believe Chicanas playing in the movimiento.

Mora Like I said as far as I could see with the women that I knew, watching Dolores Huerta, I read up on GI Forum, and there was him and his wife, Pedro and Maria Hernandez. So all the things that I saw were, there were women and men. I think we had a great influence because I think women, we have a lot to add. It's just like bringing in the diversity. We all have a different aspect, and it is about teaching other people how to listen. When I was telling you about the class, you know, we started a Chicano psychology class, and most men were real accepting. If they were a little, you know, didn't want women in the room, they never really said anything, at least not to me.

But this one guy, we were in class, and we were talking about Chicano stuff. I don't know what it, exactly what, but I said something, and he turned to me and he goes, you need to be home pregnant and making tortillas in the kitchen. I was just stunned. I was just like, what? [laughter] And everybody, because there was a couple of the guys though and the instructor both told him, you need to shut up. I can't -- and they told him how ignorant they thought he was. And he just, it was just like, what? You guys don't all agree with me. And I forget what it was about, something that, you know, we should, men and women could do that, and he was like, oh no, and he would -- and I see him occasionally, and he just looks at me. And I'm thinking, does he remember who I am, because I kind of remember who he is.

But I think, and I didn't see a lot of the differences. I know there were events that happened that everybody said, oh, the women do it. And I would see that there was just a core group of people that

would do events. I don't know if you've ever done big events, but they can get 10,000 volunteers, but there's going to be only a core group that actually does the event, and that's what I did. And it was pretty equal. The men and women both did it, only because those are the type of people that were into doing it.

Q Yeah.

[00:30:18]

Mora You know, you had people that, egos, I think men had a little bit, sometimes more egos than women, but I think, you know, depending on what it was. But all the things that I did, there was equality, and the respect that somebody would have for whoever was reading that particular activity. And then you had some other people that just had major egos, and you didn't get anything done. And

Q So that was really --

[00:30:44]

Mora But I think, yeah, I think we had a big influence on a lot of things that happened in the movement.

Q And thank you for sharing that. This you kind of touched on already, but I'm still going to go ahead and see if you have more to add. What did you personally initiate or did you help initiate in the Chicano movement?

[00:31:15]

Mora Oh, my gosh. I don't know if I personally initiated certain things, but the things that I did, you know, working with the different organizations, I worked with about five or six different organizations that were, you know, like MEChA. And I worked the LULAC, with -- right now I'm the board of the MAAP, Mexican American Addiction Program. So there's different things.

I've tried to think, you know, you do all these things in your life, and you just forget about what is it that you initiated, you know. Maybe fundraisers to help people. Mentoring. Doing those type of things. But I don't know if I created it. I don't want, you know, I'm not going to say that I did. Somebody, it may have been somebody else's idea, and I was just like, oh yeah, I'll help you, and we moved it along doing different things. But a lot of the things I wanted to do were directly related to social injustices, not so much as a party. And a lot of people want to do parties, and I was like, well, let's, you know, how do you connect it to this other thing. So, I don't know, I don't know if I, if I initiated something myself.

Q Well that's good enough. I mean you can't have a group without its members, so.

[00:32:30]

Mora Yeah, exactly, exactly.

Q Yeah. So, you were talking about MEChA and LULAC. Can you kind of, I'm just interested to hear a little bit more.

[00:32:39]

Mora Oh, MEChA.

Q Mm-hmm. The programs.

[00:32:40]

Mora Oh, God. Don't ask me what the initials mean. The Mexican Education -- nope, see. It was MEChA to me. [laughter] It was a student organization on the campus and community colleges campuses, and they had it at some of the Cal State Universities, but I think it was more prominent on the community colleges. And I believe it still exists. But we, you know, we did things politically or, you know, Cinco de Mayo, celebrating the, engaging people in Latino issues at the time, and at the time we were doing a lot of stuff with the movement.

Q Okay.

[00:33:24]

Mora So we did a lot of things. We did, we were in plays, we did plays. Just, I'll tell you, the classes we did. You know, I laugh because I work at the chancellor's office now, and I always tell everybody, think of it globally that it's the entire state, not just your little local college. But back then it was just my little local thing.

Q Oh.

[00:33:47]

Mora So we did, you know, we helped create classes on the campus or get them placed on the, or included in the classes. At the Washington Neighborhood Center, we used to have [inaudible] art class. Somebody else created it, but when I was the president, they got a new dean at the university, and they wanted to shut it down. So, you know, I brought in a bunch of people to argue why we shouldn't shut it down, and they didn't shut it down for another couple of years. LULAC is the League of United Latin American Council, and it started, it's probably one of the older groups, it started in the, I think in the, I want to say '40s, '30s, but it was started because of the injustices, and they have different councils all over the United States. They have a national council and then a local council. And again, you talk about the injustices, things that you should be doing to help create the equality with Latinos. And that started in Texas.

Then you have GI Forum. That was started, the, I think it's Garcia, I can't remember, Hector Garcia was the person, Dr. Hector Garcia was the person that started it. And he had been in the service, and when he came out, he saw all the discrimination. And he created this GI Forum in order to have equality again. As a matter of fact, he was one of the chief authors, I believe, of some of the civil rights issues, documents that are out now. I know they attribute a lot of it to African Americans. And Martin Luther King did, you know, take it that last step, but the GI Forum was one of the groups that actually started some of the dialogue with Kennedy and some of the other people. And they started that like in, I think, I want to say 1929, 1930, somewhere around there. But the different organizations that are long-time organizations, they're still existing,

MESA, the Mathematics Engineering Science Achievement program, that came out of Oakland. It was a woman that started it, and it was specially directed to Latino or Mexican Americans, blacks, and Native American and to help them with the sciences and the fields of science. So are you guys in MESA?

Q Yeah.

[00:36:12]

Mora No?

Q In high school.

[00:36:14]

Mora See, yeah.

Q Yes.

[00:36:15]

Mora So, it's, you know, it's akin to STEM. You know, they talk about STEM but with the MESA program, it's directly related for students to try to engage them and teach them, and that program, it really taught people to, well it taught young people to love, to learn how to study. That's what I took away from it.

Q Yeah.

[00:36:34]

Mora It was really successful, but they never institutionalized that into the schools, which I thought they should. But they didn't.

Q Okay. Well, it's in some schools.

[00:36:45]

Mora Yeah.

Q Yeah, it's made it --

[00:36:46]

Mora It should be in every school.

Q Yeah.

[00:36:47]

Mora It's not. It's in some colleges, community colleges.

Q Mm-hmm, yeah.

[00:36:51]

Mora And this was, they had at the UC office of the president are the ones that fund it, but they don't have it because a lot of people don't embrace it. You know, and I remember one senator wanted to shut it down because he thought it was the group that just recruited minorities, and we had to go and testify that, nope, it's open to anybody. Anybody wants to learn, anyone wants to join, they can join. And it wound up, which after I left it was kind of sad because a lot of the directors at the campuses, they got afraid, because there was a lawsuit taken up, and then, you know, they were trying to pass policy about it, but at the community colleges, there's a whole bunch of policy connections to this. That's what I talk about, you want to be at the policy piece -- that a lot of the directors thought, oh there was a lawsuit filed against the Puente program and it affected the MESA program. And they were trying to shut them down because they said, you know, it was racist. It was, you know, affirmative action only, and they were just letting Mexicans in there. And I think, and literally, somebody just said that Mexicans, like no. Anybody can go in. But a lot of the directors who were Caucasian at the time were scared to go out and recruit. Now, the lawsuit that when it ended it said you can't target, but you can recruit, but they, they think it's one in the same as -- no it's two different words, and you can recruit, and they got, they got real scared.

So a lot of the programs, they started recruiting non-Latinos and non-blacks and stuff. And I think that's going around the other way now. They're starting to recruit more Latinos and blacks and Native Americans.

Q Okay. And then, since a lot of these groups kind of started before the Chicano movement, what do you think, what's the significance of the organizations and how they were created and what role did they play, I guess, in the Chicano movement.

[00:38:46]

Mora Of the LULAC and the --

Q Yeah.

[00:38:49]

Mora You know, they came out of Texas, and my joke is because I was for Texas, and I always see people who are not for Texas, because they always say, oh, those Texans. And I always tell them, yeah, Texas came over here to, you know, to clean things up. [laughter] Because I always tease people that --

Q Yeah.

[00:39:04]

Mora Cesar Chavez was from Arizona, and it was close enough to Texas, so he learned from us.

Q Close enough.

[laughter]

[00:39:09]

Mora But I think it did have an impact because the movement here was, the Chicano movement, it started with the farm workers and stuff, and you know, all those things were evolving, but over there in Texas, a lot of things were happening with LULAC and the GI Forum, and the Chicano movement also

over there, there was a movement over there, and there were close, I think, in close contact a lot of times. I don't know all the details. If somebody asks, there are probably more details, but the Chicano movement also started in Texas, you know, with Corky Gonzales and all of them.

Q Oh, I didn't know that.

[00:39:41]

Mora They came over here. Yeah, so it was real interesting because I think it was, you know, they were on the same path, and the United Farm Workers, theirs became more prominent because of what they were doing in the fields and how they were treating people. They were beating them up, and Cesar Chavez took it to a whole other level. And I think, and I think it was in Cesar Chavez's movie that they were talking, the Texans were talking about, you know, [foreign language spoken] were talking about, you know, ooh, look at what those Californians are doing. And he did. He took it to a whole other level with the movement, I think, from California. But the things that in Texas they were doing, they were looking at things back in the '20s and '30s and '40s of the discrimination and how they treated people. And I hate to say this, there's still a lot of racism in Texas. Maybe 15 years ago, maybe a little less than that. Yeah, it was probably a little less than that. In my home town, there was this woman that was married, and they were getting a divorce, and her little girl was, the mom was talking to the little girl in Spanish all the time. The dad went to court and sued her for, you know, not being a good parent, and the judge sided with him, saying that she was abusing the child because she wasn't talking to her in English. And this was just, you know, in the last 20 years, or 15 years. So that says something that you still see that that racism still exists in Texas.

And you know, here too, you know, you see the farm workers are still being treated badly. You know, so, you know, all the things that we fought for, we need to continue.

Q No, unfortunately.

[00:41:24]

Mora But all of the organizations did a lot. I don't think they was as well known as like the movement, you know, with the farm workers and stuff. I don't think it was as well-known because you don't, I don't know, it doesn't cross over into the states or something, I'm not sure, but --

Q Yeah, that's true. I know you talked a lot about how you feel like to make a change you have to really be into the policy of it and all the political aspects, so how did that change your experiences or relationships with family members, relatives?

[00:42:05]

Mora Some people don't like it. You know, I got into, I started getting into the politics pieces and helping different people, and the right out politics isn't for me. Some of the issues that people take up I really believe in and I think that should that [inaudible] forward. So what I, you know, for me on a real simple level, an extremely simple level, is that I have a list serve, and I push out information. So things that I think are of importance, I send out to people. Other people may not like it, but, you know, hey, it's my list serve.

Q Yeah. [laughter]

[00:42:34]

Mora I can send it out if I want. So, it's just kind of educating people. Those are the type of things that I think are real critical. I'm not, for a loss of words now. But it's about just educating, I think the things that I like to do. And even just passing a little bit of information across, oh, guess what, a Latino did it. I mean I do it about with everything, I really do like what President Barack Obama is doing for all of us, everybody, so that's just his people. And I laugh, because well don't you guys remember he's half black, half white, so it's for all of us. And you know, the things that, because there's a lot of people that don't do things for Latinos, and they sit there, and they want to be your friend and you're, you know, there's a whole other story. But it's about getting into making sure that people that do get into the politics of things and the policy of things that they understand what they're, what they're able, what the outcome may be, you know, that it's, that it's just not just for one group. I was working on at the Chancellor's office, I did a project, I was working on my assignment, was distance education. So we had to do all the policy and the research and so forth. So they brought a bunch of people from across California to sit on these committees. And my boss is black, and then I was a staff person who is Latina. We'd go to these groups, and you know, they already started doing all the technology and those type of things, and all of them are white males. And you know, okay, you know, saying things, and him and I got to speak of a lot, and they're very respectful, but it was really hard breaking down those, kind of those barriers because you know, look at this black guy, what does he know. And he's really extremely intelligent that, and there were some issues, you know, about, and everybody had issues.

Q Yeah.

[00:44:36]

Mora And I remember they, our office, our chancellor brought in a staff of people from the colleges, they recruited people from colleges to be on this committee, and this one man, I said, we had to do a bunch of surveys. You know, what are the obstacles for people learning in distance ed, you know, capability of internet classes and all that type of stuff. And I was a staff person, so I work, you know, closely with the consultant, with our vice chancellor. So anyway, this man, and he'd been on the committee for a year already. Nice guy, used to come in [inaudible] shorts all the time. Never wore suits, never wore slacks, you know, and I thought, oh, he's a really cool, hippy, you know, type guy. So we were talking about, it was me, him, and a consultant, we were talking about, we just did a study, and we were talking about the issues about, we're looking at the demographics and Latinos not being involved and blah blah blah blah, and the guys says, the teacher, he was a teacher at San Diego, he says, well, you know, Latinos can't learn technology. And I just, I mean I'm almost snapped my head across, and I said, what? And he go, and he just, he goes, well, you know, and I said, well, wait a minute. And the other guy was an older white man. He just looked at me, and him and I became, the other guy and I had become friends, and I said, well, wait a minute. I go first of all I go I'm Mexican, and I goes for you to say, I go that offends me. I go because look at my skin. I go, I always pronounce my name correctly, Mora, I go so how could you say that. He goes, well, you know, and I mean he really believed what he believed. And I said, we created the zero. Give me a break.

And I mean I kind of told him a bunch of stuff, and I was so upset that this man was on this committee that was going to move our system into, you know, a whole different arena with technology, and he had that bias.

Q Mentality.

[00:46:32]

Mora You know, that that it was racist. And I was, and luckily my vice chancellor was Latina, so I went to her, and I said, you know, why do you have this guy on there? She goes, well, you know, the chancellor picked him. And I said, oh my god, you know, and I told her. And she goes, well, you know, we'll just watch him, because she couldn't go against her boss and stuff. But it was just real pitiful that this guy had that mentality. So after that I would tell him, I'd go, I'm watching you. And he goes, oh, well you know. And I go, no, you tell me how, I go if you can't teach your students, I go, you tell me why because it's you being a bad teacher not them not being capable of learning. And that was before I got onto the MESA program. So I really didn't know a lot about MESA, otherwise I would have said a bunch of other stuff, so anyway.

Q Wow.

[00:47:16]

Mora So that's part of the policy piece that is very critical when you do certain things that make sure you're on that side of the, not just protesting and stuff, but also on the policy piece.

Q Equality.

[00:47:28]

Mora Yeah.

Q Okay. So can you describe some of the impacts that your involvement in the Chicano community had on your career?

[00:47:48]

Mora My career. I laugh because I think my career is the community opposed to my job just pays me. You know, I've done a lot of things. I do, like I said with the MESA program. I did the distance step, the policy step. I work right now with the cow works program. We oversee all of the colleges in the state and we provide, well, technical assistance and so forth to the coordinators of the campuses, but I think, you know, everything I do is influenced by the Chicano movement, you know. Watching a television program. You know, talking to young people. Informing people of guess what Mexicans can do, you know, Latinos can do. So I think anything I do influences that. I don't know so much as -- I don't know how to answer that, because it's really difficult. Because you become that movement. If you did the things that you did or involved in the things that you were involved in in the past, that's you, your essence. That becomes your essence, and if your family taught you that as well, that is you, and there's no separation. So everything I, absolutely everything I do. You know, I make sure when I mentor students that I take them to plays, and they see that. They see the other side. I just took [inaudible] to a play this past weekend, and she had never once been to a play, and she kind of knew something about [foreign language spoken] but she'd never been. So, it's about doing that. I've taken people just to, you know, to go do stuff. Even the people I work with, they don't get stuff. But the things that have influenced my work. I do community work, and I, you know, I've won awards or been given certain

things, privileges and stuff. Been invited to sit on certain task force or whatever, but I am kind of slowing down now. It's your guys' turn.

Q No. well thank you. It's our turn to step up now.

[00:49:54]

Mora Yeah, yeah. But David is still doing a bunch of stuff and [inaudible] is doing this. So, anyway.

Q And then looking back at your experience with the Chicano movement, do you think that there were any issues that could have been left unresolved?

[00:50:12]

Mora There's a lot of issues that are unresolved, because we still have racism. We still don't have every Chicano in California and the United States going to school and, you know, finishing school, getting a degree or a certificate, you know, because not everybody is going to go to college. I think everybody should, but it's not some of things that still exist, you know, they were started, and I think there was a lot of us. Anyway, I had a belief in some of the people I talked to that, you know, we were in the movement and we did all this. We protested. We changed policy. You know, we did a number of things. Started programs, and our thing was, what are the young people after us going to do? What's that next generation going to -- are they going to pick up the ball? And for a long time, we didn't see that happening. So it kind of came, I thought a lot of stuff came to a standstill, but it's starting to change now. I'm seeing a lot of the people with the Puente program. The MEChA program, I don't hear too much about it. I understand that still exists or the MEChA organization, but the puentistas and the brown issues and the groups that are coming up in that era or this era now are starting to look at the social injustices, and they're trying to change that.

Q Yeah.

[00:51:32]

Mora And that is about educating the young, you know, educating people to understand where they came from so they'll know who they are and what they need to change. So, I'll tell you what somebody told me when I was in colleges. You're going up, you bring somebody up with you.

Q Mm-hmm, yeah.

[00:51:48]

Mora So that's real important. But I think, you know, those type of issues or things of concern.

Q Mm-hmm. And kind of following then on that question, how do you think the [inaudible] changed the community. [inaudible] wherever you were involved in.

[00:52:06]

Mora I think it changed the community by, and this is, this is what happened to me, and I think it happened to a lot of people to make them understand there was someone that we as a whole were very important and that us as a whole could make a change for the better. And it was about acknowledging who you are and teaching each other we are and what we're capable of. You know, a lot of the

professors and the counselors that went into the school, social workers and what not is about that. It's about, you know, educating one another about little things, like me telling you, oh, guess what, on that, did you know, you know, the director for a primetime movie is Latino. You know, and those type of things. And it's about educating each other. I think that's most critical.

Q Empowerment.

[00:53:03]

Mora Mm-hmm.

Q Okay. And, you know, time goes on, so unfortunately many of the women Chicano activists have passed on. Identify an individual or individuals that you feel had an impact on the Chicano movement and then please explain why.

[00:53:22]

Mora Oh, gosh. Well, Cesar Chavez, of course, the things he did, the injustices that he tried to overcome and he did, you know, that he did change a lot of that. Dolores Huerta, who continues to do that. She worked hand in hand with Cesar Chavez. Like I said, the LULAC with Pedro and Maria Hernandez, and then with GI Forum. Because I didn't know those other people, I know Dolores Huerta, I've been introduced to them, and I know them. They don't invite me to their parties, but I know them. I go anyway. Cesar Chavez, but the other ones I read about, and I, you know, to see what their role in the movement was. And Dr. Hector Garcia, you know, what they did and why they did it, those were real influential for me, that why I do and wanted to be in that to understand.

And my father. I know he's not a historical figure, but him talking about what he went through to get here and to give us something, to make something of ourselves and to be all that we can. It sounds like a commercial, huh?

[laughter] You know, to be that.

Q Informercial.

[00:54:42]

Mora To be who we are. So that was real critical that we learned that. You know, I can't say all the details of it. I mean I don't want to go into that, but those are probably the people that influenced me the most about why I really got into the Chicano movement and what the Chicano movement means for us. And for me, it's not only here in California but in Texas because, you know, my family was over there as well, and the racism that existed and still exists. When my mom was going to school, she got hit for speaking Spanish in elementary or in school, and so she didn't want us speaking Spanish at home. We spoke Spanish because my dad didn't know English because he was a [foreign language spoken].

But you know, their influence also as well, and they weren't, like I said, prominent figures, but they knew about everything. And I remember the day that I had gone to a meeting where they were talking about using the term Chicano to identify the people in the movement, the Chicano movement. And you know, there was a big debate. Somebody wanted Hispanic and, you know, somebody wanted what else, I forget the other terms, but the Chicano, you know, that got voted in, and I remember coming back home and I, you know, my dad was like, oh, okay, well what did you learn and blah blah blah blah.

And I said, well they're going to call us Chicanos. And he goes, well, do you know what that means? You know, from Mexico, you know, it's like Morano or something. And I said, well, I go they said that, I said, but, and then I told him how they interpreted about it being a radical term and that people would acknowledge it not so much as the bad word but as we're making a change for the good, and it's a whole ideology. And he's like, oh, okay. So he started, because he used to call everybody [foreign language spoken], and then every once in a while he'd throw in there Chicano, but, and I think because of that, you know, he didn't degrade me or anything about being into the movement or he thought it was a really good thing for me because it was getting me into school and keeping me in school, because I was supposed to get married when I was 18, and he talked me out of it. He goes look at all the things you could do if, and he painted this great picture of me traveling and doing all this if I didn't get married, and if I got married, I was going to probably be on welfare with the guy and pregnant and all that stuff. I was like, oh, okay.

[laughter]

Q He was a very good influence.

[00:57:08]

Mora Yeah. And you know, in essence these other people also talked about that, don't, there's a dream that we have to fulfill, but we all have to see the dream. And they were showing us that dream. They really were showing us the dream. So if you interpreted it from that way opposed to just the protest and all that, but there's a dream that we are going to better ourselves, and we have to better ourselves and we have to bring everybody else up. And I get real sad when I see like the young kids getting into gangs or, you know, with the droopy drawers and all that. It really hurts me because of all the things that we did, you know, to get past that, and you know, like I said, it still exists.

Q And kind of following up on that, I know there's a lot of things that still like to be changed. Like you were talking about how there's not many Hispanics or Chicanos that are graduating. But do you think there's any other issues that are still prevalent today?

[00:58:09]

Mora That with Latinos?

Q Yes.

[00:58:11]

Mora Health issues, you know, the health issues, the family issues, you know, a lot of stuff. The things, and I don't want to say the destruction of the family. Because there's one stereotype that everybody believes about Latinos that we all love our kids and we never yell at them, and you know, the family is so tight and structured and what not. It's not true. You know, we just, you know, but when somebody gets in trouble, you just move into somebody else's house. But I think it's a little, probably everything that we still need to deal with, you know, health issues. A lot of people are still, you know, the drugs. Like I said, I'm on a board that's Mexican American Addiction Program. It's been around for 40 years. Hardly anybody has known about it unless you get a DUI or something, and then you can go to the program. But understanding that, that we still have a long ways to go, and the things that we need to deal with.

So, it's the drug and the alcohol that's prevalent in our, in our race. I'll be like my dad [foreign language spoken]. But, you know, there's health issues, you know, just being -- I've been density-based clustering since I was 16 and learning how to cope with that. I think a lot of people are, you know, all the other illnesses that come along. Not having jobs. You know, why can't you have a job? Is it because you're unintelligent? Is it because people are still racist? Is it because you chose not to continue to school? Is it -- you know, again, to me a lot of the stuff goes back to the policy. Can we change the policy so there will be a start line, that everybody starts at the same line. Now if you fail, that could be on you, but at least we get on the same starting line, and a lot of people don't do that. And teaching each other about us. You know, our culture. You know, we have a beautiful culture. I don't know if you've been to Mexico lately.

Q Yeah.

[01:00:09]

Mora I love it. I want to go back again and live there, but there's way too many issues that just don't pertain to the Latino community. It's all the communities, and a lot of times it is about education and drugs and alcohol. You know, that could be, or jobs, lack of jobs. Because you don't have to have a degree to be an electrician for the most part or something. We just don't get hired, and that's where that racism still exists because racism is about ignorance. It's not about, I don't think about a lot of other things, just people are ignorant, so they become racist.

Q Yeah. And do you see yourself still staying involved with all these, to fight against all these challenges that the Chicano community faces?

[01:00:54]

Mora Not as much as I had been. I had been on about four or five organizations. David does. When David calls, I'll come. [laughter] And I don't hang up on him when he calls. But, you know, I will stay on some. I want to mentor. That's my thing, is helping mentoring. You know, so there are some political races I'll help, I'll donate money, or do, you know, a little bit. I don't like politics for the most part because of all the other stuff that's tied to it, but the mentoring and being on a couple of boards that I really believe in, that's how I'll do it. I think it's, you know, I'm getting older now, a lot older.

Q Yeah.

[01:01:35]

Mora So, you know, I just want to slow down. But I'll, you know, when people invite me to go do something, they need assistance, I'll, you know, I'll help them or give young people guidance if they want. But young people need to learn, and there are some young people that do go to your elders and ask for advice and what not, and that, which is good. And I don't know if they know to go ask sometimes.

[END OF INTERVIEW]