

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Oral History Project

Mike Negrete

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Juan Carrillo

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California State University, Sacramento Library

[00:00:17]

Carrillo Mike, I'll just say welcome again. And Mike Negrete. There's some introductory stuff that we touch on first. Get that out of the way. I may have told you, but this is, this recording is going into a Sacramento State University special collections and archives at the Library. And it's called Donald and Beverly Gerth Special Collections and University Archives. And do you agree to this recording?

[00:00:56]

Mike Negrete Sure.

[00:00:57]

Carrillo Today is the 24th.

[00:01:01]

Negrete Twenty-fifth, isn't it?

[00:01:02]

Carrillo Thank you. It is now 9:33 a.m. And this is taking place in Sacramento, California. And we start out you stating your full name. And maybe you should spell it, the last name, for the record.

[00:01:28]

Negrete Okay. My full name is Michael Philip Negrete. Negrete is spelled N-E-G-R-E-T-E.

[00:01:40]

Carrillo Could you give us your birthdate, month and date and year?

[00:01:48]

Negrete I was born September 1st, 1953.

[00:01:51]

Carrillo And where were you born?

[00:01:53]

Negrete I was born in Selma, California, the raisin capital of the world. And there's a sign if you go by 99 and past, it'll say that.

[00:02:07]

Carrillo And where were you raised?

[00:02:09]

Negrete I was raised in Fresno.

[00:02:12]

Carrillo And did you, that you were born in one city and you were raised in another. Did you move at an early age?

[00:02:21]

Negrete No, my dad was already a teacher I believe in Firebaugh. And let's see, this was in '53, and my mom used to stay with her mom, which is in Del Rey. And so she, when she had, when she was ready to conceive me, the nearest hospital was in Selma. Del Rey doesn't have a hospital. So you know, she just happened to be, we always visited my Grandma Poplado [phonetic] who had lived in Del Rey because my mom grew up there. But anyway.

[00:03:14]

Carrillo Your, your mom and dad, well first let me ask you, you mentioned your father was a teacher. Could you say something about that and what your mom did for a living?

[00:03:28]

Negrete Yeah. My dad was a schoolteacher. He was also a coach, very good coach. He could have been, he could have went professional. He reminded me of guys like Vince Lombardi that, you know, won championships all the time. And all the schools that he went to, he always had trophies where, you know, in football, baseball, whatever, and they never had, or they hardly had any trophies before and hardly any trophies when he left. But that was because he trained the kids on how to excel. And that's the way he, that's the reason why he became a teacher. He told me he wanted to mold minds. He wanted, he wanted to make sure that people knew the true history of our culture. And the reason why he became a teacher, he believed that he could, that the schools themselves, if they taught the truth, we could get rid of racism. And it's not only his belief but other educators' belief. And so that was, that was his mission. That was his mission to let people know about Mexican American heritage and culture. And he also helped a lot of immigrants get their paperwork in order and that kind of stuff. And so he was always out there in the community, you know, not only with sports but with Hispanic leaders, Chicanos, Mexican American, whatever you want to call. Back then there wasn't Chicanos. But he always did that, And I think one of the things about that is, you know,

he was the same age as Cesar Chavez. They both went in the military. You know, not because they wanted to. They were drafted. They had to go to World War II, whatever. And they came back, and a lot of these guys decided, you know, I have fought and almost died for this country. And now I'm a second class citizen. How do I change that? You know, how do I change that? And so that's why he became a teacher. I remember my Grandfather Negrete was, they had a conversation, he was kind of upset at my dad. He said, you're so intelligent you could have been a doctor. Why didn't you become a doctors? He wanted him to be a doctor. And my dad said no, this is what I'm passionate about. I want to mold minds. I want to change this culture. And people have to know, and you know, they have to, I have to be an example and show people the way because we need to get rid of, you know, our second class citizenship and racism and that type of thing, so.

[00:06:50]

Carrillo He taught what grade level?

[00:06:53]

Negrete He taught originally elementary school. And then he later went on and taught, he taught at Fresno State, and I think it was Chicano studies. It was him and Luis Valdez. And Luis Valdez is also from Del Rey. And when we went back to live in Del Rey, this was back in '68, my dad had bought the local store there. And it had burned down about a year later, and it was very suspicious. And I believe it was burned down intentionally because they knew that Negrete was there to stay. And my dad used to brag, he's oh my son's going to own the grocery store. He's going to, he's going to run the bank. My son is going to run the bank. You know, and he was boasting, but it was true. And people got scared. You know, the status quo there didn't want Mexicans to have their own power. And my dad started preaching that, he was one of the first Chicanos to start preaching green power. And what that meant is you get your own business, you know. It's a good thing to get your house, but you got to have a business to be economically free. And so, you know, he lost out because he didn't put enough insurance. And that's when he got into the Mexican American Project here in Sacramento. We stayed here after.

[00:08:44]

Carrillo Can you say something about your mom? What did she do and what her interests were.

[00:08:49]

Negrete My mom was born in Phoenix, Arizona. And the reason why is my grandfather back then was working at the silver mines. During the depression it closed down, and so they were forced to move. People owned homes and whatever, and they just had to leave. And so they end up settling in Del Rey. Agriculture, that's, they made a living, you know, picking grapes, peaches and everything else. In fact, I used to pick peaches in the summertime in high school. And yeah, that was, I remember picking grapes and turning trays and all that stuff. And I, you know, I couldn't imagine trying to make a living off that. I mean that was just extra money I had for the summer. But you know, to see

these farmworkers try to make a living off this, there's no way. They gave you a penny a tray, turning trays. You know, you work all day and get a couple of bucks, you know. And that was, that was the time, you know, Cesar Chavez was telling people, you know, we need a union.

[00:10:14]

Carrillo So your mom and dad met in Del Rey. Did you have siblings? Can you talk about your siblings?

[00:10:21]

Negrete Yeah, my eldest brother is Al, and he's a year older than me. I always followed him whatever he wanted to do. He was a little more athletic than I was. A little, you know, I was a short kind of skinny guy. But he was always, he was a tall more well-built guy. And he used to pitch and play football and all that thing. And he used to drag me out. Come on Mike, you got to be my catcher. Or you know, hey come let's do some plays. I'd say okay, okay. But anyway. And then, let's see, so I have an older brother, Al. And then I have some younger brothers. I had Tom, Bob and Mark. I also had a sister named Martha. All my brother are living here. Bob is living in Cool. Sadly to say, my sister was murdered. She was abducted in high school in McClatchy High going home somewhere. Maybe she was hitchhiking or something. I don't know. But anyway, they found her body down at Mack Road somewhere. Anyway, I was already in the Navy, and you know, I came down here, back for her funeral. But it was so sad because it really tore up my dad. I think my dad died early because of that. And it was very traumatic for the whole family. It really destroyed my dad and my mom. Anyway.

[00:12:14]

Carrillo The primary language in your home growing up, what language was spoken in the house?

[00:12:24]

Negrete It was actually at the beginning Spanish and then when I went to school, my dad said don't speak in Spanish. And I'd wondered why, the reason why he said that is because he thought we were going to be confused. And not only that but he had, you know, he told me when he went to school, he didn't know English. And so the teacher would actually physically hit him, put soap in his mouth. And he didn't understand what was going on. Finally when he started understanding English, he, you know, he found out that you were punished at school for speaking Spanish. And I guess he thought that the school system or the teachers were going to frown upon it if we spoke Spanish. And he had a bad experience, so he didn't want us to go through that. So anyway.

[00:13:33]

Carrillo And he grew up where?

[00:13:34]

Negrete He, he was born in Colton, California.

[00:13:38]

Carrillo Colton?

[00:13:39]

Negrete And raised, yeah, LA. And that's another, my Grandfather Negrete came from there. And he was, he made his money off bootlegging, you know, and how they sold the little ice cream, things like that. Well, he had, he had the liquor on the bottom. He would sell that. And police officer on horseback stopped him and was going to arrest him. And he actually pulled down the police officer and took his gun away. I guess he must have hit him or something. But he got away. But he had to move from Colton after that, and he settled in Fresno.

[00:14:33]

Carrillo Can you describe a little bit more about your own childhood, you as a young boy, growing up.

[00:14:46]

Negrete Well, growing up, we actually lived in Fresno, the outskirts of Fresno. It was South Cherry Avenue. And my parents took me to parochial school. It was Saint Johns Parochial School. And at that time my mom was working at a, it was a frozen food place, and she had to get up real early, and she would drop us off, and she would go to work. And then there was a neighbor nearby that used to pick us up. But anyway, yeah, we were indoctrinated by the church, you know. And we went to church every day. It was one of those things, you know, we went to mass before we came to school. And it was just that way because my mom used to drop us off and they had mass at like 7:00 in the morning and after that we would go across the street was the school. And so we were indoctrinated in Roman Catholicism. You know, I was an altar boy later on. We stayed there until I think the third, fourth grade I think. And then we started going to public school. And my dad was a schoolteacher in tranquility. We moved, and remember I was in the fifth grade. So that was like '64 or something like that. And that's a small community. And you know, I was really whitewashed because, you know, being taught Roman Catholicism through the Catholic school and then living in neighborhoods where there was basically nothing but White teachers and everything else. And I remember the first time, this was in Firebaugh when my dad was, they had housing for the teachers. And I was playing on my bike outside, a tricycle. There was a little White girl next door. I don't remember her name. But the first thing she asked me is what nationality are you. And I didn't, nationality, what is that? I went and told my mom, what nationality am I, mom? And she goes oh, you're Mexican American. So I went back and told the girl, I'm Mexican American. And she just gave an ugly look like, you know. And I went back and I told my mom I said, mom, I want to change my nationality. And right then, that was the first time I encountered racism, I think, you know, and as a little kid. And Mexican American is, you don't say that to White people because they frown on it, you know. They, you know, like you took a dump or something, you know. And so I learned, you know, to hide my nationality, you know. And I was light skinned. My mom was light

skinned. My dad is dark. Me and Al were both light skinned and they say, they don't say Negrete, they say Negrete. And so everybody thought we were Italians. So we, you know, and I would just scoot by and say yeah, I'm Italian. You know, you say Mexican American and -

[00:18:52]

Carrillo Interesting that you bring that up because the question, the next question how did you deal with your experiences or your families, experiencing any discrimination. And you went ahead and on your own talked about early discriminating event in your life.

[00:19:11]

Negrete Yeah.

[00:19:12]

Carrillo But are there others that are, that you remember.

[00:19:17]

Negrete Yeah, what really, what was a cultural shock to me was when I moved to Del Rey. Before then, we lived in affluent neighborhoods, all White, all middle class. And so I grew up thinking I was White. When I went to Del Rey, I knew I was Mexican. It was a cultural shock because everybody spoke Spanish. Oh, okay, you know. My grandma, that's all she spoke was Spanish. Poblano [phonetic], she was Spanish. She was a Poblano, and she lived right there in Del Rey. And I saw how the whole society was down on Mexicans, you know. If you were Mexican, you worked at the, out in the fields or in the packing house, you know. You didn't work in a nice air conditioned office somewhere, you know. You know, and I saw the way they treated the Mexicans. You know, they basically, you know, said you know, this is your place. You know, you have to, you know, you have to do the menial jobs. And I said, you know, I knew something was not right. And it really shocked me because I was sheltered from that. And then to be just thrown in it, you know, I said yeah, this, you know, wow, you know, this is really amazing. It opened my eyes to see how my people actually lived. And it really frustrated me. It left me very angry because I said how can I change this, you know. It's been going on for, since the Mexican War, Mexican American War, over 150 years, whatever. Oh, how are we going to change this? You know, and that's when I met Cesar Chavez and Luis Valdez. He had the Teatro right in front of our store. It was Main Street Del Rey, and he would throw the shows, the Teatro, the Campesino, Teatro Campesino. And I had so much respect for Luis because I was too scared to let me voice be heard, you know. Oh, are my people going to get upset. I knew anything I said was going to upset White people. Right away they started yelling and screaming and, you know, we'd get this backlash from White people one time. That they want to put us in our place. But Luis Valdez had the balls to go up and tell the White people, you know, hey, you know, you're really messing with us, man. You know, and it was, he was teaching the Hinte, you know, because a lot of Hinte, how do they get, they don't read English. They don't, like my grandma, they don't, they have to, their news comes from the radio, the Mexican radio

or the Mexican stations. I don't even know if they had Mexican TV stations back then. So their news came from the Mexican stations, you know, which basically just reiterated what the White people say. And so he came out with a whole different perspective, and he was educating the Hinte, hey, we got to rise up. We're second class citizens. And this is, you know, we need to start a union, and we need, he was talking about, you know, standing up. And so much of our Hinte maybe not be legal, and so they're scared of authority. And they don't want to confront authority and everything. And here he is, man, he just stood up and said what it was. And my hat goes off to him.

[00:24:14]

Carrillo The community that you're talking about, and maybe it's not just in Del Rey you wanted to stick with, but it can be just Del Rey. How did other Mexican Americans, Latinos, how did they react to that, the movement, the earliest, and Luis being an example, Luis Valdez and the Teatro Campesino being an example of the earliest Cesar Chavez. To the term Chicana, Chicano, Movimiento Chicano, Chicana. Do you remember how people -

[00:24:56]

Negrete It was mostly the young people that lived in town that would associate with Chicanos. The other people that were from Mexico, I don't think they, you know, they weren't willing to accept it. And from what I understand, Chicano was a negative term. And so if you're a Mexicano from Mexico, you're not going to accept that. You're not going to, you know, I think they had trouble understanding that. Because their roots came from Mexico and they probably wanted, you know, they probably already had family over there. And they know that they were going to go back to Mexico. Usually they worked and sent all their money down there and stuff like that. So I don't think they, you know, there was an unwillingness on their part not to accept it, just to kind of just. And they wanted to be in the shadows because they, you know, they didn't vote. They didn't want to confront, you know, if they spoke out you stand out. They didn't want to stand out, you know. And so you know, they didn't really put us down, but again, they weren't going to, you know, protest and go on strike and that type of thing. Where we were willing to do that.

[00:26:39]

Carrillo I take it you're now in your early teens, maybe mid-teens, during this time?

[00:26:45]

Negrete Yeah, this was, yeah, yeah, yeah, I was actually, I was a sophomore in high school, and I was going to Sanger High.

[00:26:56]

Carrillo So what did you know about the larger civil rights movement in this country at that time? Were you aware that there was -

[00:27:05]

Negrete Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, I was aware, this, you know, when I was in the fifth grade, John F. Kennedy was assassinated. And I always wondered about that. This country has never recuperated from that. It, this country had never lived up to the tenets that it professes, democracy, justice, you know, all those things that are abstract words but we die for, you know. My dad almost died in Germany. And it's, we need, I don't know. I could tell you stories about my dad, and I believe in guardian angels because, the man tell you the story, it makes me cry because I always, when I was a kid I always telling my dad, what did you do in the war? My dad, I don't want to talk about it. I was the first one that he spoke about it. And he was a radio man because he knew Spanish, and they taught him French, German, Italian. Anyway, they, he fought in the Battle of the Bulge. They were already in Germany and they got hit and the tank was on fire. And he said he was the last one to leave because they had to strap on his. And as the guys were jumping off, he heard them, he said he could hear the machine guns. He could hear, you know, they were dying, but he had to jump off or he was going to die. And so he got on top of the tank, and as he jumped, it exploded. And he said the only thing that saved him was the radio on his back because the shrapnel went all over. And he, it was snowing. He said if it wasn't snowing he probably would have lost his life. But anyway, can we take a break?

[00:30:10]

Carrillo Sure. I wanted to ask you what your thoughts were about the civil rights movement and Movimiento, the Chicano movement, the Chicano Chicana movement. Could you, can you identify any connections between the larger civil rights movement in the country and the Chicano movement?

[00:30:42]

Negrete Yeah, first of all in this country, you know, in the Southwest you've got your Mexican Americans, your Chicanos. But in South, well Southern America, there's a lot of Blacks. And the Blacks actually probably had it worse than us. Because they, you know, they have a history of being slaves. And not only that, I mean even today they still show videos of cops beating up Black guys all the time. And I'm sure it happens in the border, but nobody's filming it and everything else like that. And but anyway, like I said, I became aware of it when John F. Kennedy died. And I go, how could this happen? How could a president get assassinated. You know, it happened before. You know, I understand why they assassinated Lincoln because he fought in the Civil War, they were at war, you know. But we weren't at war, you know. And but the broader thing about the whole thing is what happened is World War II changed this country. And what I mean is that all the men had to go fight. The women were producing things here, the ammunition, they were building. And when all the guys came back, they say hey, we just fought, we just fought the goddamn Nazis and then I got to come back here. The Black guys had to confront the Ku Klux Klan. You know, back here, we've got the sheriffs arresting us for trying to start a union, you know. And what it was was the guys coming back here said hey, we gave our lives up. You know, a lot of guys died over there. And you know, Blacks and Mexicans. And now we got to be second class citizens? I don't think so. And so it was those guys coming back from World War II that said, no, I

deserve more, better than this, you know. If you, you know, and so they, you know, they started the civil rights movement. It basically started in the South, you know, with Martin Luther King because the Blacks didn't even have a right to vote. And here, they had the Mexicans that was scared to vote. You know, because they're going to throw them back to Mexico or whatever. Or, you know, and so there was a whole lot of intimidation for you to just vote. And there was no political power. There was no political power. So the whole civil rights movement was about we need our political voice. And how are we going to do it? Well, we've got to have a civil rights movement to allow us to vote. Not only for the Blacks but for the Mexicans too. And you know, and there's still gerrymandering and everything else, you know. And it's, the GOP to this day is fighting tooth and nail to stop us from voting, intimidating us, you know. And so you know, in the large sense, it was all about in the 60s, the civil rights movement was all about getting political power, getting to vote and getting political power. After that, the Blacks got a lot of seats in the governors, city management, that type of thing. They started getting senators, and that was, so. And same thing with us. The Chicanos started doing that too. And so it went hand in hand because, you know, we were both in the same boat fighting for the same things. And what I saw was, you know, the Blacks actually initiate something and then the Mexicans would follow suit. And I noticed that, what were the Blacks doing? Okay, they're doing civil rights. We need to do civil rights. Oh, they're, you know, they're voting for people in power. We got to do the same thing. And so we were kind of copycatting what I thought was the civil rights Black movement in the South. We were emulating them. Which was fine, you know. And but the thing is, you know, people who stand up and do the right thing, they get assassinated. Martin Luther King got assassinated. Robert Kennedy got assassinated. Why? Because he was going to become president, and they knew that they were going to, I still believe that there's, you know, the White power groups or whatever, that philosophy and that structure still exists, and they manipulate the political scene. I don't know who, but I know why. You know, who does it benefit? It benefits the White people. Why do they want us? Cheap labor, you know, whatever. You know, keep us in our place, you know. And look, you know, when I talked to my teachers about it, you know, they always, oh, it was economics. They never mentioned race. You know, you couldn't get, even today, White people don't want to mention race. They want to put it under the rug. They know they have, you know, their sins of the grandfather comes to haunt them. Even to this day, the GOP doesn't want history books out, especially little kids, tell them the truth about slavery. You know, and it's still going on. And they realize their fighting this in the education system now. Because they don't want, they want their kids to be racists. They don't want them to learn the truth and feel guilt, to feel repentant of their granddaddy's sins. What did the White people do? They killed all the Native Americans. They put them in reservations. They started war with Mexico to take over half their land. You know, they brought in the Blacks as slaves. And this is worse than, well we always had slavery back then. I said if you look at like Roman slavery, if you were a slave in Rome, you could actually become free if you fought as a gladiator or went somewhere else. Or if you were a good citizen, they would actually give you your citizenship and stuff. And so at some point, you could be a slave, but you could have kids that would be free. Not here

in America because what they said is pituitary, oh, pituitary, that's a gland. What they're saying is you're, if you're Black, you're going to be a slave and all your kids that are Black are going to be future slaves. And that was going to go on forever. And the reason why we had the Civil War is before we had the Civil War, this country had the Mexican American War, right. And so you had all this land in the Southwest from Texas to California. And the Gueros, the White Southerners, wanted to draw a line straight down it and continue slavery. And Lincoln, thank God, we had a president that said no. That we had a president that had the balls and the morality to say no, that, he knew that this country would not, he knew it was sinful for this country to have legal slavery. So we had the Civil War, you know. And you know, and we always say oh, it's changed. But when he got assassinated, when Lincoln got assassinated, it did change things because the guy that became president, he was from the South, and he allowed the Southerners to do what the hell they do. You know, they put statues of Robert E. Lee in front of city hall. What the hell is that? It's like the Southerners want. And they twisted everything around like as if they won the goddamn war. And I don't think that would have happened if Lincoln was president. I don't think he would. He would probably have said, you know, you can have those statues at a Confederate cemetery or a museum or something. But not a goddamn city hall with the Dixie flag flying and everything. But anyway, I got caught off on a tangent again.

[00:41:51]

Carrillo I wanted to bring up the Mexican American Education Project. It's a, are you aware of the Mexican American Education Project?

[00:42:06]

Negrete Well, I believe that's the one that my dad went into. That was back in '68 or something like that. I don't know if it's still going on. I hope it's still going on.

[00:42:22]

Carrillo So what do you remember about the project? Do you have any strong memory of it or what do you know about it?

[00:42:33]

Negrete Yeah, because we were living in Del Rey, and the, our store burned down. And I was, I was really upset because I knew that they, it was burnt down intentionally for us to leave. That, you know, it forced us to leave Del Rey. And for better or worse, I just said well, it's in God's hands. I don't know why. But you know, if we were to have that store, all the Negretes would have married the local gals. We would have owned businesses there, whatever, you know. I probably would have been a millionaire, owning a store. I probably would have started a tortilla factory or something. I always in my mind, you know, how to make tortillas, how to make menudo. And I was thinking, you know, how to do the big factory and stuff like that, you know. Because I remember, you know, cutting the hominy and the tripe and all that stuff. And I was thinking, you know, I'm going, I've got to make a factory so we can, you know, can menudo and make tortillas

and that type of thing. But it wasn't to be. It wasn't to be. God didn't want me to stay there and be rich I guess. You know, I think we all would have been very wealthy, because my dad was setting us for the next move to, you know, to become economically free. But -

[00:44:24]

Carrillo When you were, when you were being educated, let's say college level, because the Mexican American Education Project was a college level program. Your father was in it. When you were going through your education, did you learn about culture anthropological studies, cultural anthropology or the role of culture, education.

[00:44:59]

Negrete Yeah, I took, I took a couple of anthropology classes. And I actually took art of the Americas. And that was really interesting. I took it as city college, the art of Americas. A guy named Smid is a German guy, but he was, he was very, he was bilingual, and he knew how to speak [inaudible]. And it just astounded me that this guy could do that. And then he actually invited us, the class, to his house because he had little figurine statues that were from ancient time, Olmec and Zapotec and all these ancient cultures. Totally fascinated. He married a Mexican woman in Mexico, and he spoke fluid Spanish, and it just shocked the hell out of me. Guerro was bilingual and not only that he knew Naolan. And it encouraged me to go in there and study that. But I learned a lot of the ancient cultures from Mexico from him. And I'm glad I met him. And then I also took some classes at, because sometimes I took an anthropology class, and that's where I finally understand what the women's rights, women's liberation movement, you know, being Chicano and being, this machoism. It was hard for me to see, because at first I said well, what are these women doing burning their bras? What's happening here, you know? And then when I, there was a book that we had to read and it was called, I can't remember what it was, but it was basically these college kids studying an ancient culture that wasn't contaminated by industrialism. They went, I forget, New Guinea or somewhere, primitive culture. And they, the lady that was writing the book said you know, she wrote all the duties that they had to do, and then they divided it up. And the men didn't want to do housework. They didn't want to wash dishes. Didn't want to make the meals. You know, they thought that was women's work. And so, you know, and the, and then that's when I realized, you know, oh, that's what that is. You know, women are saying, you know, the roles that men and females have, they don't have to be, you know, they, you know, they can change. And they, she pointed it out, especially because of that culture they had a flood. And the women had to do men's work and the men had to do women's work in order to survive. And so the same thing here now because it's not about surviving, but it's about equality. And so women were finally saying, you know, no men could stay home and take care of kids too. Women need to be paid as much as men and that type of thing. And finally I said, oh, okay, I understand now. You know, but -

[00:49:16]

Carrillo Your studies and your awareness of the world around you that this happening, the Chicano movement and the civil rights movement, women's movement, maybe other things. How did that impact your involvement? Can you describe how you became involved, or did you become involved in the Chicano movement or any of the political work at that time?

[00:49:51]

Negrete Yeah, I think the first time I, I think it began with seeing the Teatro Campesino. And it inspired me because Luis Valdez was, he was instilling pride in ourselves. It was the first time that Mexicans, I saw Mexicans being proud of themselves. You know, it was always, you know, if you can get away without, you know, a lot of Chicanos and Mexicans change their last name, you know, especially when they got famous and stuff like that. And, you know, they try to hide their identity, you know. A lot of people didn't want to admit they had, you know, Latino blood or whatever. And it was, and that's what, that's what got me to be passionate about it, because I said we have to love ourselves. We have to, How can we do for ourselves if we don't love ourselves. You know, if we buy into the myths that they created for us to live, we're living a lie. We're living a lie. So what it was, was is be honest, be truthful and love yourself. You know, and that was the message I got because every time at the end of the play, we all did the clap. [Clapping] You know, and viva la raza, you know. And that's the first time I heard, nobody viva la raza, you know. And it was about loving yourself, loving your people. Don't be afraid to stand up and show the world that who you are. And you're not going to sit in the back of the bus. You're not going to, you know, you're not going to be in the shadows. You're not, you're going to stand up there and you're going to vote. You're going to demand change. You're going to demand change for the better. And so that's when I got involved because I knew that this was something that had to be done. It wasn't something that, you know, and I was living it, you know. You know, I got to, I got to see that and then, you know, I remember one of my tias, Esther, she married Gil Patia, and they were both into the Farmworker's Union. And she would tell my dad, hey, we're going to boycott Safeway here. Or, you know, there's a boycott over here. And so I remember making signs. I remember, I always remember making posters and stuff like that and getting ready. And then, you know, we were protesting. We started protesting out in the field and stuff like that and.

[00:53:44]

Carrillo Can you be specific, not that you have to be, but can you be specific about, you know, out in the field making the signs and going through that change, internal change that you described because of Luis Valdez? Can you say a little bit more, explain how you changed personally.

[00:54:16]

Negrete Yeah because, you know, before that, before moving to Del Rey, this was like '68, early '68, I considered myself White. You know, I was pretty much brainwashed. And you know, like I said we lived in teacher's housing is mostly nothing but White people. There was affluent, so I was sheltered from that. I didn't know. You know, and everybody spoke about equality and democracy and justice and everything. So I thought everything

was a perfect world. I was sheltered. I didn't see it. But when I moved to Del Rey, I saw how they treated my people. And this is the, and it was like going into the Twilight Zone, you know. Like hey, everything's great, you know. And then boom, you see reality. And when I saw reality, it totally shocked me. I go, what world am I living in, you know? You know? It was a cultural shock to see that. To see that. And how we accepted that, you know. And I'm glad, you know, because it's like, I don't know it's like jumping into cold water or something. You know, and I started questioning, you know, how in the hell did we get here? You know, it woke me up. It woke me up. You know, I, you know, if I didn't move to Del Rey, I probably wouldn't be Chicano. That really changed me because I saw the Chicano movement unfolding in front of my eyes. You know, that the Teatro Campesino. We had the store across the street was the hotel. And that's where Luis stayed. And that Campesino was there, and my mom would cook for them and stuff like that. And they would come in, I remember his brother Danny would come in and my mom would give the guys food. And then we would, Danny would say hey, can you help me make signs. We're starting a union where we need some signs. And I said yeah, and we made the signs right there at the store. You know, and I think we had the, my dad bought the sticks and the, you know, the, you know, the paperwork or whatever we needed for the posters and stuff like that. And we just hand painted everything. And so yeah, it was good to see that and to help out those guys. You know, I know we helped the farmworkers out. And my tia was involved in it. And, you know, my dad was involved in it. And they were real passionate about it, and so was I. And we, you know, that, we did what we could to help Luis and Cesar.

[00:58:18]

Carrillo Do you have a point of view about Chicanos in the Movimiento? Do you have any thoughts on that? Do you have experience, do you have? What do you believe the role of Chicanos and Chicanas were in the Movimiento?

[00:58:45]

Negrete They were leaders. A lot of them were leaders. And I felt that, you know, when Cesar died, they should have gave it to Dolores Huerta. And they didn't, and I think it was all because, you know, too much machoism, you know, and she deserved it and she should have got it, And so the Chicano movement too, and that's what I learned too, that Chicanos need to wind down the, you know, our machoism. And, you know, when the Chicano movement started, you know, you had the Brown Berets and everything. But you know what we missed? You know, we were protesting police brutality and that kind of stuff and everything. You know what was happening in LA during that time? They, any Mexican woman that went into one of the hospitals, and they closed it down, they would tie their tubes. So there, and it was illegal. But they forced the women, you know, you want your baby born here, sign here. And the fine print said we're going to tie your tubes. And the Chicano movement missed that. You know, yeah, it's a good thing that, you know, we stand up and fight for the community. But what about our Chicanas, man, they're, you know, that's a way of controlling us, you know. They don't want our numbers. They don't want all the, you know, they know our numbers are going to mean

political power in the future. And so you know, you had White doctors, and they were doing that in the South too to Black women. And so how come the civil rights movement didn't catch that? How come the Chicano movement didn't catch? You know, and so, it's because of our machoism, you know. We let our Chicanas fend for themselves when we should have been standing up and we should have put those guys to jail, those doctors that were doing that. Anyway. So you know, the Chicanos that came up, they should have been rewarded with, you know, a title, and they weren't. They were always in the shadows. And we should have put them up front. But you know, we have to learn from our mistakes. And I had to learn from my mistakes. Because, you know, I was taught not to go in the kitchen. I remember as a little boy I went in the kitchen, and right away my grandma and, no, no, no, you know. One of my aunts had to go get me a glass of water. We were taught that. You know, the woman's place, that's the kitchen. You don't even step in the kitchen unless you were invited. The only time I went in the kitchen, my grandfather would play cards, solitary, and then he would invite me. And so I, we were at the table just playing cards. But as far as the kitchen, I couldn't even get a glass of water, you know, because of that, you know, the stereotype that, you know, this is a woman's place, this is a man's place. And we all, you know, when it comes to survival, things change. But when it, you know, we needed to look at equality. And we're not going to be equal until women are equal with men and everybody, all the races are equal. And so that's what I learned.

[01:02:48]

Carrillo We're on the downhill part of the [inaudible]. There's only a few more questions. I've lost track. I don't even worry about the time. But we're going to go into a little bit of how you, let me make sure I'm asking this question correctly. What did you personally initiate or help initiate in the Movimiento? Maybe you can mention organizations that you were involved with as well or, and how do these organizations happen, how did they contribute? And what is your involvement with some of the organizations that you were involved with and how did they contribute?

[01:03:56]

Negrete Let's see, I don't know if I, when I was in college I joined MEChA, and then I became president of MEChA, that was a city college. And so, and what we did is, I used to get the, I remember getting El Grito, I think that was a publication out of Berkeley I think. And then the Farmworkers publications, and we used to pass those out. And we had fundraisers, and I was also involved with Concilio, and that's another thing. I wish Concilio was still going on. I don't know, but it was a good thing because I remember getting involved with a guy named Miguel Lopez, and he ended up becoming a dean at Davis. And he actually helped me go to Davis. But that's another story. Do you want me to tell that story?

[01:05:19]

Carrillo I just asked the question. If you -

[01:05:22]

Negrete

Let me, because anyway. So I got involved, you know, dispensing publications from Chicanos. Chicanos were starting to write things and put, it was the first time we heard of pesticides poisoning the water. Birth defects from farmworkers, pregnant female farmworkers that was going on, you know. And nobody knew about these things, you know. Cops deporting people, Mexicans that were born here. That happened all the time. They would sweep and sure that there must, maybe half of them were from Mexico, but half of them were from here. And they didn't, and they didn't know how, all you Browns just go. And so they, those were the stories that they were telling. The stories, you know, that White people didn't know, you know. And we were spreading that word to the colleges, at least the people that were getting [inaudible], at least they opened their eyes to what the things that the Chicano plight, the Mexican American, what we had to go through, you know. And you know, the poverty we had to live in and everything else like that. And so I got involved with MEChA, the Farmworkers Union, Concilio. And then I helped, I think my greatest contribution, believe it or not, was going to the high schools, the local high schools here while I was in college and encouraging all the Chicanos to go to college. Go to college, go to college. I encourage them. And not only did we say it, but we actually helped them fill out the, you know, all the forms and stuff like that. And that was through Concilio. Concilio had their staff that knew that stuff. I was familiar with it because I had to do it at that time. And so we helped, we would have conferences and say here's the paperwork. Fill out the paperwork. This is what you need to get grants and scholarships and that type of thing. So we pushed that. And not only that, at first, when I was in city college, they had a student union, brand new. Nobody used it. We were the first ones to use to throw dances to have fundraisers so we could, we can give scholarships and that type of thing. And then because of my involvement with the community, and I knew people at Concilio, the guy that was the educational program at Concilio, he became a dean at UC Davis. He brought me in, Miguel Lopez. But and then, I'm going to go on a tangent here. What happened is, remember Bakke. Bakke happened at UC Davis. It was one of the deans, admission deans that helped Bakke file a legal case. And what they wanted to do was to strike down affirmative action. I think the, they weren't successful. But it caused such a ruckus, and I remember protesting it. And then we took over the dean's office. We took over the president's office and held it there for a day. And they said oh, we're going to bring the police, so we left. But I had to, that's when I joined the Navy. Believe it or not I was at war with UC Davis, and I couldn't study. You can't study and learn if you're at war. And they started the war, you know. I went there to study. I wanted to be a doctor. And when I, you know, it was all about keeping Chicanos out in the medical school, you know. And I, and I said, you know, I said, I was at war with everybody there, you know. And so I let, in order to find peace I had to go into the military. It's so ironic. I see so many things so ironic, you know. You're supposed to go to school to meditate and learn, and it's supposed to be not only learning experiences. It's supposed to find out who you are, you know. I went to school to know myself. And it wasn't a career. You know, again, I could have, know I could have been a millionaire if I would have, if I would have studied business or if I would have studied construction or something like that. And I tell, man, I should have done it. I could have been a millionaire. But what I wanted to do

was, I was on a spiritual quest. It was to know myself, to know my place, to figure out what it is that we need to strive for and go for. And so it became more than just academics. And I'm glad I did it. But anyway, I hope I answered.

[01:11:48]

Carrillo I've got a few more questions.

[01:11:52]

Negrete Okay.

[01:11:53]

Carrillo One has to do with the activists that surrounded your life. And so many passed on, so many people in those times are no longer with us. Could you identify an individual or individuals that are no longer with us that had an impact on the movement and their significance on you, the movement and what the significance of those.

[01:12:34]

Negrete I think the two guys that stand out, well actually three guys, was first my dad, you know. And I saw what he went through.

[01:12:43]

Carrillo Could you give us his name. You haven't mentioned it.

[01:12:48]

Negrete Oh, my dad's name is actually Onesimo Alfredo Negrete. And he was born in Colton and raised in Fresno and grew up there. And I think his experience, you know, you know, he would have, if there was no Chicano movement, he would have done what he would have done anyway. You know, and he would have been a teacher. He would have been a history teacher. He would have told the history of Mexico and the United States truthfully. And his thing was to try to get rid of racism. And so my, you know, he's my hero. And he would have done what he would have done, even if there was no Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, whatever. He would have done that, you know. Because he went through his experience, you know, said okay, I almost died for the country. I'll be god blessed if I'm going to come back here and be a second class citizen. And so he started, he was doing his own thing. And when the Chicano movement went out, he was on it, boom. And him and Luis Valdez, Luis Valdez was the second guy because him and my dad were the first ones to start Chicano studies at Fresno State, okay. And so that told me a lot. And so those guys had the balls to do that, you know. And that was, you know, the [inaudible] were going to say oh, okay, I think we need, no, you had to demand it. You had to forcibly demand it. And you had to create the monies. We had Chicano studies at Sac High, but it wasn't official, and there was no money for it. The guys that did it were volunteers. The Chicanos that volunteered, and they just said okay, do it. They allowed it because we had a walkout. And that's why they did it. But if we didn't have that walkout, there would be no Chicano studies. And the same thing with,

you know, in Fresno at that time, you know. You know, Fresno was like, like a Black man living in Georgia, you know, or South Carolina or something. And the next guy is Jose Montoya because he started, he started the organization, the World Chicano Air Force. But it was actually called the Rebel Chicano Front, Art Front. And it got confused because people said oh, are you guys from the Royal Canadian Air Force? And then I think it was Rudy, Rudy [inaudible]. He was all set, he was wearing that, he was wearing his World War II pilot hat and jacket in there. And he goes, no we're from the Royal Chicano Air Force. But he started that, and then, you know, when we had the walkout, I remember Jose actually taking us in his van and taking us through the central because he knew my dad, and he knew there was 100 cops with their batons waiting to beat our heads. They were right there on the overpass, you know, a block away, and we were there, you know. And then they brought us out. And so those are the three guys that are heroes that they started the Chicano movement. And they were activists until the day they died, you know. I think Luis Valdez is still going on. But what I like about Luis is he ended up making some Hollywood pictures. And one of the most famous ones was La Bamba. And of course, you know who blew up was Los Lobos because they played, they sang the song La Bamba. And so, you know, it all fit together, you know. It all, but those are the three guys that are my heroes. And they started, they were instrumental in the farmworkers movement, which basically was the hub for the Chicano movement. And from there, you know, the alto [phonetic] group broke off. And you had political parties and stuff like that. But it started with the Farmworkers Union. And anyway.

[01:18:15]

Carrillo Thanks. Your final comments is a set of questions. It's really one question I think when I look at it. The things that have not been resolved. The Chicano movement started for a number of reasons, but the things that we've never addressed or completed and leading to what are our challenges still today? And will you be part of it? So that's -

[01:18:56]

Negrete I think, yeah, I think what I'm going to have to do is I'm thinking of probably writing a book. Because I'm just too old, and I, you know, it's hard for me to just walk around anymore. But I think, we just, the Chicano movement just hit the tip of the iceberg. I think we, you know, and we always talked about, you know, as Chicanos, we always talked about, you know, what's our utopia. What's our ultimate goal? You know, do we want to form another nation, Aslan nation, you know, and that type of thing. And I think what needs to be, there needs to be a whole lot of things done. I'm going to have to, I believe in reincarnation, I'm going to have to be reincarnated a few more times so we can eventually have Aslan. Because I, there's, I remember even when I was in your class and I talked about it, and I don't know if I mentioned it in class. But there was a book, there's a guy called Edgar Casey, and he's called a clairvoyant. But anyway, he produced a lot of readings. And the reason why I mention him is because in one of his readings, he discusses how man was created. And it's not in the Bible, but this is, to me this is truth just like it was from the Bible. And he said that about a million years ago, man was created, okay. And not only man was created, but it wasn't like in the Bible Adam and

Eve. It was five races, and the five races was all created spontaneously. And not only was it, it wasn't just a one man and one woman, it was a nation. And so God created the five races, not only the five races but the five nations. So based on that, and that comes from reading the, this is now, I'm going into a part of philosophy called metaphysics. And this is where the guy that was speaking, he doesn't even remember what he's saying because his consciousness is going to a cosmic consciousness. And it's called, they call it the akashic [phonetic] record. But it's a record that records all the events throughout mankind since a million years ago. But anyway, the reason why I mention that is because we have a God given right to not only be free and worship our true God but to have a nation. God created Aslan. God created our nation. The Red man had a nation. The Brown man had a nation. The White man had a nation. The Yellow man had a nation. And the Black man had a nation. They were all born, the Blacks were from Africa. The Whites were in Europe. Anyway, you know, the Brown race was born in the Andes. And so we actually probably have more in, more DNA from the Andes than from, you know. The Aztecas were basically the Brown and Red man mixed already. You know, because the Red man was Americas, and the Brown man was from Latin America. Today Latin America, and they probably fuse together. They probably battled each other for land and resources and created the Azteca Nation. And so we have a God given sovereignty right to have a nation. And that's why I bring that up because this is a right that comes from God himself. Not only did he create us, we are hardwired to know God, not only to know God but to know what He desires from us. And part of that is to have nation. And so it's our God given right. You know, we should have a voice. Not only here locally in local politics but at the UN. We should have a say into world politics. That's how much we lost. We lost our nation. We lost our culture. How are we going to get that back, you know? How are we going to get that back? And so we need to look, and what I would tell, that's why I want to write a book because I want to do a parallel of how nations started but especially how Israel got started. Look at Israel. Israel was destroyed 2,000 years ago by the Romans. We were destroyed how long ago? Five hundred years, whatever, you know, by the Conquistadors, the Spanish Conquistadors. Now the Spanish, they're nothing. You know, the Romans are nothing, you know. But there's going to come a time, United States is not going to be United States the world power forever. So what we have to do is we have to, just like the Jews said, we have to go back to our homeland. You know, why do they go back to the homeland? Because there was a fascist dictator that killed them off. If you would ask a Jew back in the 1930s, hey, how's it feel, oh it's great, we've been here. I got a bank. I own this business. It's great here. We love it here. They tried to kill them all. Hitler tried to kill them all. That was the big lie. That was the big lie. What's the big lie here? You know, everything's perfect. Everything's great. No matter what we have here, it can change like that. Trump almost took over. Trump almost killed democracy. If this democracy goes, we can no longer be at peace. We'll be the Banana Republic. You know, then we'll all become Jako Veras [phonetic], you know. Jako Varas [phonetic], you know. I don't want to see us go that way. But you know, Jay wanted to, he wanted to destroy America. Why? Because he's a product of seeing what America did. He went to, he was from Argentino. He went to Mexico City to become a doctor. Again, I tried, I see so many parallels, you know.

Anyway, he's riding his motorcycle, you know. And what does he see? He sees the United States Marines taking over Panama. They had a free democratic elections, but they voted for a communist, you know. And it was like oh, okay, whatever. And so that scared the hell out of the United States and said oh the communists are going to take over. And they nationalized the Panama Canal. And so America couldn't stand for that, so they made Jay because Jay saw what America did to Panama. And so he wanted, that's when he said, you know, that's what he met Fidel. And you know, I read his book. They came in a little boat with 50 guys, going back to Cuba. And he said he was carrying two big bags. One was medical supplies and one was guns and ammunition. And he was being a doctor you'd think he'd grab, you know, he said no. I can only, you know, bullets are flying. I got to, so he became a revolutionary. But what I'm saying is we need to talk about how we're going to develop our nation. And we need to prepare for it because, it's our God given right. It's our God given right to have a nation. And we need to, I don't hear nobody saying that. But I'm basing it on what I have read and understand to be the truth. And so that's why I said I need to write a book because I'm going to pass away and if I don't write a book, nobody's going to know what I'm saying. But that's probably going to be my legacy if I could write a book before I pass away. But it's basically going to say, you know, this is what we have to do. And we have to get right with our God, and we have to establish a nation. And we have to have a voice in world politics. That's how strong our voice has to be. Just like the Native Americans have their sovereign nation, we have to have a sovereign nation. Where it's going to be I don't know. You know, I would say, you now, like do back in the 60s, man, take over the God blessed missions. You know, the missions were designed to, you know, to subdue the Native Americans to, you know, to get them all believing in Jesus Christ. But it was basically a prison. They locked up the Native Americans there. It was a prison for them, you know. And so it should be, those missions now should be this place, you know, an institute for language. And how do they commit cultural genocide? By destroying our language. By, we know more about ancient Greek than the Zapotec Indians. They're right here. Who were the Indians that lived here, you know? The Miwoks or something? No, we don't even know half the tribes that were decimated. And that's gone forever. Anyway, that's my take. We got a lot to do, Juan.

[01:31:27]

Carrillo That's what they tell me. Anyway, it's over. The interview is over. You know, for the record, I'll just say thanks.

[01:31:42]

Negrete You're welcome.