

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Oral History Project

Celia Rodriguez

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Theresa Riviera

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Unofficial transcript generated by Panopto captioning services; edited by Savannah Mitchell

California State University, Sacramento Library

[00:00:17]

Riviera So this interview will be video and audio recorded and will be, form part of the Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Project Oral History. Which is archived after Donald and Beverly Gerth special collection and university archives at the Sacramento State University. Do you agree to this recording?

[00:00:42]

Celia Rodriguez Yes, I do.

[00:00:44]

Riviera Today's date is August 4th, 2023. The time is 9:30, and the location is in Sacramento, California. Could you please identify yourself, please, and also spell your name?

[00:00:59]

Rodriguez My name is Celia Herrera Rodriguez. And it's C-E-L-I-A H-E-R-R-E-R-A R-O-D-R-I-G-U-E-Z.

[00:01:13]

Riviera Thank you. Could you provide your date of birth with the month, the date and the year?

[00:01:19]

Rodriguez November 26, 1952.

[00:01:22]

Riviera And where were you born?

[00:01:23]

Rodriguez Here in Sacramento.

[00:01:25]

Riviera Okay. Now we're going to talk about your early life.

[00:01:27]

Rodriguez Okay.

[00:01:29]

Riviera Where were you raised?

[00:01:30]

Rodriguez I was raised in downtown Sacramento, it was referred to as central or was referred to as Alkali Flats, where Zapata Park now sits. I was raised in that neighborhood from about the age of I would say five to when I left home as a late teen, in my late teens. Before that, my family lived up on Fifth and S, Third and T Street. I think those are the houses that I remember. So mostly I remember as a neighborhood as a child, the downtown area. It's about Ninth and E Street, basically, I'm speaking of part of that vario [phonetic].

[00:02:18]

Riviera Thank you for the clarification. What did your parents do for a living?

[00:02:25]

Rodriguez My mother died when I was five. I really never knew my father, so I, as far as I know, my mother worked very, she was very young. She worked in the restaurants as a waitress. And then my grandmother worked in the cannery. She also worked in the restaurants early on, and then she worked in the cannery, the various canneries around Second and Mentho [phonetic] at the time. She also took in laundry, did cooking and caretaking for a lot of the elders that had retired from the Southern Pacific Railroad. And there were a lot of folks at that time, you know, Filipino and African American and Mexicano, Chinese, you know, and they were all in housing areas now where the courthouse sits all around that area from Ninth and E Street, there were a lot of boarding houses. Up from, you know, heading toward downtown up on Ninth Street. Boarding over to Fifth Street up into 12th Street. So she did, she had her, you know, her folks that she cooked for daily and helped them clean and mended their clothes and washed. You know, that's what she did in the offseason of the canneries. Did some housekeeping, I guess, but more so in our community.

[00:03:52]

Riviera Thank you. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

[00:03:57]

Rodriguez I have one brother who I wasn't raised with because of my mother's untimely death. She died of, I think it was a lymphoma. We never really knew because I think, my feeling is we were undocumented. No one ever speaks of it, you know, in those days. But so her care and treatment was a little bit unclear. I know that she was hospitalized here at SAC and the County Hospital. But my mother always, my grandmother, who I call mother, always referred to her having breast cancer. But when I got older and I began to investigate, you know, how quickly she died after the birth of my brother, maybe 18

months after the birth of my brother, we figured it must have been a lymphoma that she passed from. So I didn't get raised with my brother because of family dispute, you know, with my stepfather. And my grandmother, she sued for custody. And my uncle and my grandmothers, my only family, close family that I have here. And they, and because of that, I believe they were able to fix their papers following that time, that court hearing. So pretty much my brother and I didn't connect up until we were much older, probably in our early 20s. Although he grew up in Stockton with his father.

[00:05:28]

Riviera And you said fix your papers. What does that mean?

[00:05:32]

Rodriguez It means they're finally able to get a green card. Yeah, my uncle came here at 14 to California. He worked up and down the state up into Oregon and Idaho as far as I know. And then he came back. He worked, I think, at Oakland, San Leandro, Hayward, you know, I think when he first came here, he worked in the South somewhere like around Bakersfield in the Coachella Valley, maybe. You know, I think in Indio is what I remember hearing the stories, yeah. And then he kept moving up after, you know, he worked there for a while, supposedly to pay his fare for the with the coyote. And then he began to move up into Oakland, Hayward, you know San Leandro area and then he kept moving up, and he ended up in Idaho. And he ended up coming back at the end of the cycle, right. He found Sacramento and settled here and began working in construction. So my mother and my grandmother came, followed some years later. I think he must have come in like the 40s, you know, and mid 40s and then followed by my mother and my grandmother. So that's what I mean. Like I don't, they never really say what was up with those papers. They never talked about it. But it's only kind of looking back and piecing together some of the story, you know.

[00:07:04]

Riviera What was your primary language when you were growing up?

[00:07:07]

Rodriguez Spanish.

[00:07:08]

Riviera Please, if you can describe your experience as a child and a youth in your family and your neighborhood, as a child in your neighborhood.

[00:07:20]

Rodriguez Well, it's funny because I was just talking to my son about it because he was asking me about Zapata Park, the history of the park. And so I grew up on Ninth and E Street. I went to school at Saint Joseph's School. I went to school briefly at Washington School, but it was maybe a longer walk. And so I, the mates, I think there was a place in Saint Joseph's, so I was maybe two blocks from my house. So now it's a parking lot, but it was

a small school, mostly Mexicano. And all the Catholics, you know, like Chinese, Black, a couple of, you know, German, Italian, Portuguese, but mostly Mexicano kids. My neighborhood was a very, I remember it as a very multicultural neighborhood. Largely Mexicano but also included Sikh Punjab folks, you know, East Indian, Japanese, some Asian, Chinese, Native American, Native American relocated, Native American California. There were Roma kids, you know, Gypsy folks. So there were a lot of families that lived in the area. And then there were a smattering of elder German, you know, folks that got sort of left behind I think in that area in terms of White flight. Because I don't remember a lot of White folks there, except maybe some working class folks. And then there were apartments and houses, mostly apartments, that in which Black folks from Louisiana and Southern Texas. And pretty much that was, that was our neighborhood. I think the way I see the neighborhood bordered by maybe like I Street, maybe not as far as I, but maybe like G, and G Street, H. And then bordered by, I think it went all the way like to Third Street and all the way up to 14th Street around there somewhere. And then there were other Mexicano neighborhood because further up and like up to about 19th St. Nineteenth Street seems to have been the border for us, you know, between the working class folks and the middle class folks. So it was a very rich neighborhood. The early value was so beautiful. Families, lots of families and, you know, like I said, all the elders retired. But I think the neighborhood seemed to be very vital to me as a kid. So much that I remember of it was a lot, you know, was just fun, you know. I mean, the rivers were close by. The kids were always in trouble somehow by, you know, walking off to the river. And we hung out in groups of kids. Most of our families worked, you know. It used to be very hot, so we spent many, many evenings as a big bola [phonetic] of kids running around. The older kids and younger kids would follow them around, which is probably what got us in trouble, you know. I tell my son a lot of stories about this. And my youngest son, and he goes, how did you have so many adventures? And I said, well, you have to leave your house first of all. You have to go out the door, and you can't ask permission, you know, because your mom's going to say no when you say I'm going to go play by the river, you know. But I made sure when my kids were young that they all took swim lessons, you know. And I kind of knew pretty much, you know, all the cycles. Because you know, the train tracks run through there. There's the river. Miller's Park, trucks coming and going from the canneries. It was just, you know, a lot going on in that neighborhood. But I remember it very, as being very, I don't know, rich, I guess is the only thing I can say in terms of culture.

[00:11:17]

Riviera Did you or your family experience any discrimination when you were growing up?

[00:11:25]

Rodriguez Oh yes. I mean for one thing, I worked at the Catholic school at Saint Joseph's School as a kid for my tuition, partial tuition. And of course, then, you know, it meant that I was at the, you know, beck and call of the nuns. And most of the time it was great. But every now and then we had incidents. Like I'd be sitting, and one incident I was sitting eating my lunch, and there were like two girls next to me who were, just happened to be

White. It wasn't like, you know, it wasn't unusual. I was just sitting eating my lunch. They were there, and I had, and the nun comes up to me and says, can you clean up, you know. So it was, there was a bunch of paper thrown around. And I said, well, why me? You know, they're sitting here too, and I've already completed my task for the day, right, my job. And she told me I was insolent and sent me to the nuns, you know, to the principal. And then my mom came. My mom hated to come to school, right, because she did not speak English and always felt very ill at ease. Even though, and so frequently, I had to translate between why I was in trouble. And my mom in front of the nuns never took my side, you know, she never did. It was only afterwards that she would get mad at me. But then say, you know, the nun doesn't like you, and you know, all of this kind of, you know, response that she probably would have liked to have had but didn't feel empowered to have. So and yes, I mean we'd go downtown to shop and my grandmother, and this is how I knew is that she would not go into some of the stores. You know, she would not go into Montgomery Wards or Penney's or some of the department stores. She shopped at Woolworths and Grants and, you know, I think it was called Payless or something small, small stores that had like dime stores, right, that had goods and things that she felt comfortable and stayed out of the department stores. When I got older, I was the one that, you know, went in to do things or buy things that she needed. I also then became the translator for my grandmother and some of her friends. A lot of her friends, you know, that would borrow me, [Speaking Spanish] because I spoke Spanish, English Spanish, early. You know, I could five. I was speaking English to some extent. And then by the time I was, you know, a little older than I'd translate for her at the welfare office, at the Social Security Office at the post office, wherever, you know, she needed. And then her friends would ask if I could go with them to the doctor's office, for instance. So I frequently found myself facing folks that spoke to me about my grandmother as Mama. Ask Mama this, ask Mama that. I'd always get really, I didn't like it till I got old enough that I could say, you know Senora Garcia, Mrs. Garcia. She's not your Mama. Because it really bugged me. I could, I felt the discrimination in the questions and how the questions were being asked. The same thing when I go with families, and here I am talking about very private things, you know, hospital, private body parts, and they're speaking to them like their children. And I'm a child, and I'm filtering the questions into questions that I feel are, to ask them in a more respectful manner, you know. And so it was, and so there was a lot of, I think political consciousness that grew in me as a kid and watching the interactions of how folks were treated, you know, in Sacramento. So, yeah, when I say discrimination, I find it, there were many other incidents, you know, as I was growing up. But I think the primary ones were the ways in which, you know, our family had to contend with, you know, the lack of translation and the attitudes that people had outside of our community, you know, so.

[00:15:32]

Riviera Thank you. So now we're going to go to the earliest memories of the Movimiento of the Chicano, Chicano. So what are your earliest memories of events that attracted you to El Movimiento?

[00:15:49]

Rodriguez

Well, how do I put it? I was in Catholic school, and the positive thing about the nuns is that they always had this discussion with us about vocation. About the world wasn't just revolving around to us, that no matter what we did, we had responsibility towards society, I guess is how they would put it. And so early on, I began volunteering, and I volunteered for the Red Cross. I worked at the, I volunteered with Catholic Youth Association. I started campaigning for Robert Kennedy. I did the, what was it called, the, I forget the campaign they had. But it was basically clean up your streets, you know. And then I, and so in my neighborhood, as I was growing up, I saw small organizations kind of spring up in my late teens. My uncle was very conservative. In fact, he's, you know, he became a Republican. And so his, you know, I began watching Cesar Chavez activities on TV, right. And but what impacted me was watching the kids be sprayed with the hoses and the dogs in the African American community that was on the news all the time and the Vietnam War. And so at the time when I was that young, I associated racism not with the treatment of us as Mexicanos, which I experienced as prejudice at the time. But racism I understood it from watching the news and treatment of Black people. And I saw that happen in my own family when I was playing with a little girl. And I must have been like around eight or nine. And she was a young Black child, same age as I. We were playing, and then one of my other friend's family came up to me and said I'm going to tell on you. And I'm like, tell what, you know. So I followed her. She did, she went to my mom. And she went to our house, and she told my grandmother that I was playing with this little Black girl. And I looked at my mother, like, did I do something wrong? And, I'm sorry, I keep exchanging grandmother and mother because I was with her all my life. And so I really, you know, thought of her as my mother. And she just kind of nodded her head and gestured for me to go back and play. So I knew that was okay, but I also learned that there was something wrong, right, that there was something wrong. And that stayed with me. And so I think watching those children, you know, the way they were being treated and then becoming aware of prejudice and racism, you know, from movies, from, you know, all around me. That was my first indication. And so a lot of things happened to me along the way, you know, between my grandmother and myself and my own life. And so I believe that by the time I saw the Chicano Movement was not until I really got into high school. Like I remember walking into Washington Center, and I've always wanted to be an artist since I was nine years old. I just identified I was going to be an artist. What kind of an artist I didn't know. But that's what I was going to do. So I walk into the center with my friends, and I see, I believe it was Jose Montoya or Estelle [inaudible], one of them were painting in there, the mural that's in the Washington Center. And I walked out again. It was like there's a Mexicano. They're making art. It was too much for me to handle. I left and I didn't see them again until I started, you know, at SAC State. And so when I walked into SAC State into my classroom on the board, Jose Montoya had written, this class is meeting, you know, at the Reno Club. And I thought, oh man, by the Reno Club. That's where my mom, my uncle, everybody hung out. That's like the main stage. And my [inaudible] when he used to have to babysit me because my grandmother was working late, right, in the cannery, she sometimes worked two shifts. He'd throw me in the back of the car, drive over to play pool at the Reno Club or go

hang out, and I'd be in the back seat, you know. So summer months, I just remember all of the drama outside the club. So I get to the club and there's Jose holding class. And then I walked home afterwards. And my mom says [Speaking Spanish]. But she had this question like [Speaking Spanish]. And the tone of her voice said, like there was something up. But I said it was great. It was fine. And she goes, oh, [Speaking Spanish] As it turns out, her friend Sherpa [phonetic], who worked the bar, had called her and said, guess who's in the bar. So I went back to, you know, Jose. And I said Professor Montoya, you know, you have to come talk to my mother. I can't come to your class. So he actually came to see my mom. He came in, my mom, you know, gave him some coffee. And she looks at him and she says, do you think that that's the best place for my daughter to be learning. So he explained. To her, all of the reasons why he was using the club and all this and, I don't know. I don't quite remember what followed. But I did stay in his class, and that's what brought me back to my community. The fact that walking in between Jose Montoya and Sam Rios and all the classes that were held in community really reinforced for me that there was value in my community. You know, that there was something to be learned, to be seen that I probably wouldn't have seen since my vision was heading outward. You know, you go to college, you leave, you go that way. So returning and being part of a community just kind of made sense in the whole of it. So that's the, that's my first indication of Chicano movement running into. Well, I think my freshman class I remember was huge. People from the entire Central Valley all the way down to Coachella all the way up to Colusa, that freshman class was enormous. And so when I came in, I met all these different folks, and many of them already had this idea of Chicano consciousness. I was still seeing myself as Mexican. And, but it made total sense to me. Because it took into account my whole experience in a way that Mexican only took my immediate family and my immediate experience.

[00:22:36]

Riviera So during that time, how did the other Mexican or Mexican Americans or Latinos react to the term Chicano or Chicana?

[00:22:48]

Rodriguez Well, my mom didn't, not that she didn't, not quite like it. She didn't quite get it. She just really did not get it. My uncle just thought it was just, you know, nonsense. You know, it was my tio and I fought, oh my goodness, from like maybe age 15, maybe age five. I got our first argument when we were five, so we always argued to the point where my grandmother, like, she's just, you know, like, you know, yeah [Speaking Spanish]. Because we couldn't sit down without having some discussion. And he actually provoked a lot of those discussions by making these outrageous statements. So I think my uncle liked to debate. He just didn't know how to do it in a, you know, a more, I don't know, productive manner, you know, which turned into arguments all the time. But the community, it was very mixed. I have to say it was very mixed. A very mixed reaction. It all depended, you know, some of the families and some families who were really supportive of their young people, of the kids, I think really took to the idea. I think they were maybe a little bit shy about it. What did it really mean to them? But as kids,

you know, folks in my, community, I think, had the same response. It was pretty mixed. I think it remains so. Many people think of themselves as Mexican American and Mexicans. They understand what that is and had a harder time thinking about what does it mean to be Chicano. Even though culturally, I think, you know, it began to really grow. I think the cultural aspect of it and understanding. So that's as much as I can say, you know, that I remember at that moment, you know.

[00:24:35]

Riviera Thank you. So at that time, had you heard about the civil rights movement? And if so, what were your thoughts about it? Could you identify any connections in a Movimiento?

[00:24:50]

Rodriguez Well, like I said, I saw it on television on the news. And I think by age 16 I was a pretty angry kid at that time. And actually my school in some ways was progressive, you know. Because at the time, you know, the nuns were going through all these changes, you know. The church was going through all these changes. So we had progressive nuns, and we had conservative ones, you know. The progressive ones gave us things to read. I remember one of the priests in my religious class, which I used to take because I like the philosophy. You know, I like thinking about those things. He gave us a task, is God dead? We were all supposed to read, and I got Marx. I got the readings on Marx, which made total sense to me, you know. So that got me reading more, and so I think I read Malcolm X. And Malcolm X made total sense to me. So in my Catholic school, which was Bishop Manogue, I, you know, I worked with my friends who were Black and Chicano to start an African American club. So we started the first African American club. And again, I tell you, at the time I was still associating, you know, Black struggle, racism in America from that perspective. And as Mexicana Chicana at the time, I still did not experience or feel personally what that meant for me. That was high school, you know. So at the last years of high school, I started to politicize myself in terms of racism. But I still did not connect it to my own experience in terms of racism as a Mexicana. It happened. Once I started school and began to take classes and began to look around and began to meet other people and began to reflect on my own experience to realize, right, that there was this, that the civil rights movement was happening. Because I was involved politically, and like I said, I worked in the, you know, the Kennedy campaign. He was murdered, and that had a great impact. All the murders of the time had an impact. I noted them. And I think it took, but it took a moment to reconnect that to my own experience. I think it didn't just, you know, I didn't just wake up and say, yes, you know, I am being, you know, I am experiencing racism. It took an understanding of what that looked like for our community. You know, what did it look like for us as Mexicanos? Not in terms of Black, not in Black terms, but in our own terms.

[00:27:41]

Riviera Thank you. Were you in the Mexican American education project?

[00:27:49]

Rodriguez No, but I had a lot of friends who were. You know, a lot of the students came. That's why I think why the class was so large, people came to study. And they were quite active, the Fillitos [phonetic], they were quite active. So I knew people in the program, but I, no, I came to study art. So I, you know, I came to study art, but I wanted to come in through EOP. So I did, and I, you know, I took ethnic studies classes, Chicano native. Oh, I took, you know, took me forever, but because what I noticed right away was that there were no Mexican Chicano, Latino, nothing, art history classes. There were Chicano teachers and Native American teachers, Black teachers. But there was no African American, you know, art history native. There was Native American art history because Frank LaPena was teaching, so I took all his classes. And I took Native studies. That's what threw me into ethics studies was that I basically challenged my department. I wrote a letter asking for permission to take these classes in lieu of art history classes that could inform me about my own experience. So that didn't happen immediately, but by my sophomore year, I began to, you know, to challenge, you know, what didn't exist in our, you know, in our art department.

[00:29:20]

Riviera Thank you. So educational and/or cultural influences. Did your knowledge of the cultural issues influence your involvement and participation in the Movimiento?

[00:29:35]

Rodriguez Definitely, definitely. I think that I mean, I think the questions that I see, my history diverges a little bit. You know, there's a lot of personal issues that I, that I found to be political but that weren't necessarily part of the Movimiento. And then I also then began to identify with larger issues. And so that, you know, for one, I was recruited and was selected to go to Cuba on the Venceremos Brigade. So that was, I was, what, 18 at the time? And the Venceremos Brigade in Cuba for the months we spent there had great impact on looking at the issues, social issues that existed in the US and how that looked like throughout the continent and how it looked like in the world. So I think that worldview that I was able to experience in Cuba really influenced me deeply. Coming back then to Sacramento, I think that some of the other questions that I had about my own, not just identity, right, not just cultural identity or political identity as Chicano but also as a woman. And I began to, you know, to really question at the time my own sexuality, you know. But I really didn't know what to do with it and where to take it. So it put me kind of on the outside a little bit, you know, of the main movement that I was, you know, people and people that I was encountering. But the person that I connected to, Mariana Rivera Castorena, Mariana Castorena Rivera, who, I don't know if she's been interviewed, was maybe two years ahead of me. And she already had a very, she was from Colusa and had already expanded political consciousness. And so you know, she basically gave me, she was like a mentor, basically. But, you know, she gave me so much reading because she really wanted me to go to Cuba. So she gave us a catechism class, you know. All of these struggles from Africa to Latin America, you know, the politics of China, of the time. The politics of the US, and so I was reading, you know, to prepare to apply to go on the Venceremos Brigade. And that kind of, Venceremos Brigade itself,

which introduced me to cadres, to going to work collectively in San Francisco and Oakland at the International Hotel struggle. At the struggle for, you know, the high school merit college at the time. You know, trying to keep the campus from moving, you know, and continuing to be accessible for the community there in Oakland. Going down to work, Cesar Chavez, you know, work with, to do collective work in Delano. Those kind of activities of reading, learning, talking, discussing and working in community, you know, again just added another layer. So when I return coming back from Cuba, I came back to school, and I realized I wasn't ready yet from school. And so I left school, and I went to work in the Movimiento in New York. I went and became part of a central Accion Social. No, excuse me, it was called. Latino sonidos. I'm sorry that Latino sonidos in New York. And I worked with Dominicanos and Cubanos and Puerto Ricanos. And I was the Mexicana in the Latinos when he was. And I worked with a lot of young people. We were all very, very young, anywhere from 15, and those of that were older were in their 20s or early 30s. And so we worked in community there in a Dominican neighborhood. The Young Lords had just occupied the church on 110th Street Cathedral. I worked on education and health, you know, basically attracting clinics into the community, making sure language was adjusted because they had a clinic that spoke, doctors that spoke Haitian. But this was a Dominican neighborhood. So I was there about a year, and I began working for the Venceremos Brigade also as a cadre leader and recruiter. And so I, it took me through the all of New York and Brooklyn and Queens. And there was a professor from Queens who basically paid me a stipend to be an organizer at the time. So I was there for about a year. And then I went briefly to Puerto Rico and then back to California. When I got back to California, Bert Corona's organization sent to the Accion Social Autonomo in LA, which was recruiting folks around the issue of immigration and undocumented, you know, changing the mind, our own minds as to how we saw our own familias as documented and undocumented. Or as they would say then, wet back. And that I spent, so I went and volunteered there for about three years. I worked for Casa [phonetic] for three years doing, organizing, and also organizing other centers, raising consciousness and doing advocacy work in their legal office. And I basically stayed there until I decided to come back to school. You know, and so my whole life, my whole personal life is going on around these issues, but it wasn't located in Sacramento. The time I was here, I went back to school. I continued to work for Casa for a while. And then I ended up, because of my experience at Casa joining the Communist Party USA and doing activity and again cadre and political activity, consciousness raising in my community. And basically, Gus Hall and Angela Davis would run for president, and we would use the opportunity to go house to house, talking about central issues that affected us in our communities. So that work I think was going on parallel to the Chicano movement. So I could say that in part I was active but not always here in Sacramento.

[00:36:02]

Riviera Your personal impact in the Movimiento, did your involvement in the Movimiento change your personality?

[00:36:12]

Rodriguez My personality. I don't think so. I think I was always kind of annoying. I know I annoyed the hell out of Jose. And I think they saw my leftist, my politics as being leftist. And people refer to me, you know, as a feminist and in a much more derogatory manner sometimes, you know. And I mean I love them, but I didn't think I could change, you know, what I saw as my own work, especially since I was at the time questioning, you know, how the work I was doing as an artist was going to impact, you know, the social issues that we were encountering at the time. So I think when I went back to school, I went back to school in political science and economics. And I ended up switching back to art because it kept calling to me. And so I became involved again, you know, on the periphery, I would say, you know, of the Chicano art movement here. And but I, but that was alongside the other, you know, concerns that I had and connections that I had made, you know, in the Bay Area. And then in terms of the influence of Bert Corona and working in Los Angeles with Casa, which was way ahead of its time. I mean identifying the issues that we had in terms of the political impact of what could happen if we would think about undocumented people as fellow, you know, that could share, that were protected by civil rights. That we could struggle for them to have equal access and opportunity. I mean talk about an immigration system that has never existed, that has never, I mean they talk about it being broken. Was it ever in good repair, you know. So I think that the work that he started, which is interesting because at the time Bert Corona had, you know, the congressman, the senators came to him for advice on policy. You know, now we're back to asking policymakers to make good policy. Which I think there's something a little bit crooked about that yet again, because it is the community that knows it's needs and a politicized community that can impact policy. So it's not just stamping yes, this is good, no, that's not. It's what do you need? And I think that's something that was so crucial in my development like to see that as an organization and to have that ability. And then as an advocate, right, to practice, right. To go to different communities and organize and become involved and see what the issues were. So I was in Texas and came up from LA to the Bay Area. And then I worked in, and then I ended up in Chicago. You know, so I've traveled and still been able to remain parts of community or to see what community, what it means in different communities basically, if that makes sense.

[00:39:34]

Riviera So you mentioned earlier that Jose, when you were talking about [inaudible]. Which Jose were you talking about?

[00:39:42]

Rodriguez Montoya.

[00:39:43]

Riviera And then you mentioned that you were going back to school. Which school?

[00:39:49]

Rodriguez I'm sorry, I was going back to SAC State. Yeah, I returned. You know, in this story I'm telling you also, by the time I was about 24, I had three children. You know, so when I decided to go back to school and I was living in LA, I realized I needed to come home where I had a support system. You know, so I came back to Sacramento, and I went enrolled back into Cal State. And it's funny because I'm working in LA, and I realize that all of the folks I'm working with, all the young lawyers that were interning and that were volunteering in the office that, you know, that that we had created to support civil rights and to also to do immigration law when it went into, when it went into federal, you know, concern. Like in other words, if they were deported, came back and had federal crimes. They were all at Loyola and UCLA. They were all in law school. And so I remember going to Bert and saying, Bert, you know, shouldn't I go back to school? And he says you're getting a better education than you'll ever get in school. And I'm going yeah, but you teach, you know. I mean, you teach. And they're going to school. And all I have is a high school diploma, you know. I mean that went through my head, and I thought, no, you know, I appreciated the work, and I did learn tremendous, but I knew I had to go back to school. And no one was going to take care of that but myself. So I brought myself, I called Antonio Castaneda, who was there at the time. And the Isabel Hernandez. And I just happened to call the office when Isabel was there. And I said, Isabel, I need to come back to school. And she says just get up, just get here. Just get here. And they basically, I don't know how they managed it, but it was somewhere in September, and they just got me in to school. So I think the networks at the time were very strong. And we had a lot of, we were very empowered, I think in a way, you know.

[00:41:50]

Riviera So the next one is the role of all women in the Movimiento. So what role did you believe in the Chicanos play in the Movimiento?

[00:42:05]

Rodriguez Well, you know, I read a lot of interviews now of the movement and some of the early books that have been written. I've completely been written out of the Casa history, you know, as just one of the volunteers. And all the volunteers that were there, many were women. You know, we've been written out so often, and so the young people, because I teach, you know, they always say oh, the women really struggled so much, you know. And they didn't get any [Speaking Spanish], you know. And I said well, they didn't just struggle, they did all the work, you know. I mean, women in hand in hand, you know, basically kept things moving and organized. And I think also as activists kept things moving and organized. In terms of even of being able to have, you know, communication and solidarity, you know, with each other. So not straight, not straight across. I mean the Chicano movement was affected by patriarchy. I mean, we live with it, patriarchy, hierarchy. I think we've, you know, I don't think there's anything not to say about it. It's there. There was ways in which, you know, women were not, like for instance, I was expected to participate, you know, to fill in the, you know, like if I wanted to paint, I could fill in the area. I wasn't expected to be an independent thinker necessarily. You know, so I remember walking into a meeting as the Chicano artist, and

there were women and men there, the same collaboration. And I walked into the kitchen where all the women were. And then I walked into a living room or a dining room where all the men were seated at the table. And I asked myself, where do I belong? And so I went to the kitchen, and I said, do you all need any help? And they all said no. So I went and sat down. And then they came out and they served everybody, including me. And that created a tension that never ended, you know. And I and I also then learned that I could choose that there was a relationship there in terms of choice. One is were you useful, and what are you here for? You know so, but it was there. That tension was there. You know, so I think the mohedus [phonetic] in the movement really had to struggle to understand themselves like what was their purpose, and what did that look like? You know, because the language is growing up around us but wasn't necessarily present at the time. You know, I was referred to derogatory sometimes, you know, in terms of being a White woman lover or a feminist. And that was not a good term. And or I was referred to as a dyke, you know. Which maybe they identified me before I did, you know. But you know, those were things that were telling me that I wasn't being collaborative and cooperative in a way that I was supposed to. You know, like, I wasn't following the program. And but like my grandmother had always taught me, you know, she always talked a lot about integrity. And so I had a lot of loyalty to her as a single woman who came here in her 40s to make an independent life, to have to leave her little rancho and bear the scorn and the gossip and everything, you know, in order for her, you know, to have an independent life, which she valued highly. I think of her as the first feminist in my life. So that's what I had as a, you know, as the bottom line. Like, you know, how do you have that integrity and independence?

[00:46:05]

Riviera Thank you. So the next one is roles, role or and/or contributions to the Movimiento. What did your personality initiate or help initiate in the Movimiento?

[00:46:21]

Rodriguez What I personally. Well, let me see. I think first of all, starting back at Casa in Los Angeles, Burt Corona sent me up to the Bay Area to organize a conference so that we could create consciousness about, you know, this solidarity toward undocumented folks. His politics were that, you know, [inaudible] was always being accused of being against immigrants. And the conversation and the unions at the time were that immigrants, undocumented immigrants or illegal immigrants, as they're referred to then, were basically used as scabs, you know. And so they weren't allowed in the union at the time. They were not recruited into the unions. If you didn't have your green card. And so Bert felt that if you offer union representation and supporting community for undocumented folks, why would they not want that support? Why wouldn't they want better wages? Why wouldn't they want insurance? Why wouldn't they want social security? You know, all of this, and I mean social security in terms of all the social needs that they had. So he never spoke bad about Cesar and always encouraged us never to speak bad about Cesar in public or, you know, amongst ourselves. He talked about the history of the, you know, of the movement and what Cesar was doing and his

representation. But he also spoke to us about what we needed to think about, which was within our own families? Could we bear that kind of division where we think of our families as illegal? And now we're talking about mixed status families, you know, what that means? What the impact psychologically means that the time it was a political impact. And so his striving to open the unions up to undocumented people included Cesar included the Union Farm Workers Union. So I went up to the Bay Area and my task was to knock on doors and ask people if they would support us. and everybody, everybody would say to me, well, we can't support you because we support Cesar. And I said, but Cesar is not against undocumented people. He is not against, you know, his own community. And they said, well, you know, this is not necessarily true. So I said call him. And so we started a series of phone calls to Cesar, responded to by, you know, his organization. And within a few months of this, we continued through San Francisco Bay area. We were able to achieve the conference. Bert's strategy was always, you know, he always give us \$50 and a couple names scribbled on a piece of paper. And the mission, go do this. And so off we went to do it. And so we found, what we worked with a couple organizations, Chicano Mexican organizations. One was the social work workers organization in the Bay Area. And then a church. And some professors and teachers. And we used the church for the conference. Malaquias Montoya at the time made a poster for me to announce the conference. He also got me a couple of gigs at Berkeley, you know, they gave us money to support ourselves. I stayed with friends. We used the mimeograph machine from one of the priests. And the social workers brought the food, and we ended up having a conference on undocumented issues in which Bert and a lot of the folks that he was working with came to speak and created one of the first Casa organizations in the Bay Area. Oakland, I believe, it opened up in. And also then, not long after my return home, Cesar's lawyer released a statement saying that Cesar does not, is not against undocumented, he's not against immigrants. And we took that little thing and we ran it off and we used it from that point on throughout California. That was the first, I think, where I feel impact of my work, you know, within the collective that was Casa, you know. And then, same with, you know, the work in New York. We were able to get a clinic set up in the area in which I was working with a Yolanda Lathena [phonetic] as we collaborated with the Young Lords. We collaborated with other folks in the community to be able to re, how do I put it, reorganize that clinic to reflect the needs of the Dominican neighborhood. We also had a polio policy, and we conducted polio vaccine and was a sort of like Clinque Larassa [phonetic] started doing clinics on Saturdays where people could come for, you know, for free exams and bring their children for, you know, for immunizations. So I think those were two things. The other impact I think was later when I came back to California in the 80s when I was here and I came out through a newspaper called Mom, Guess What? Which didn't go well necessarily in the community for me. I felt ostracized. But on the other hand, working with the Yolanda Lathena, excuse me, working with this organization that we called, what was the name of that organization? Jente de la Viente [phonetic], I think it was. Something very vague, you know. But we started organizing as Latinos and organizing dance parties and bringing in actual musicians, Mexicano musicians, to play Mexicano music so that we could experience our own culture as queer people. So we did, you

know, when I was here a couple of years of organizing work amongst ourselves. Right as AIDS was climbing, you know, and trying to establish a better perspective of ourselves and a more culturally relevant aspect to ourselves. So I would say that besides my work as an artist, which is much later during my school years, during these young years, I think that my contributions were really towards, you know, the more accessibility of our community to healthcare. To, you know, to expanding our ability to have our culture fed, education, those kind of things, you know.

[00:53:04]

Riviera Thank you. So the effects of the Movimiento on the life in Sacramento or where you live, describe how the Movimiento impacted the community life here in Sacramento.

[00:53:19]

Rodriguez Well, the biggest impact was the, was saving our community, our neighborhood. I mean by the time folks began organizing the Alkali Flats, you know, the resistance to, you know, to the, what was the decimation of our, I mean that neighborhood was razed. It was decimated. Houses were bought out from people. Or they were, you know, renters that had to move because the owner sold their houses. Those houses began to all of a sudden go up in flames. Our neighborhood, right as I was living in it, my grandmother in the Alkali Flats newspaper, her house is the last house left on the block. And there's a moving, there's a machine, you know, one of those big earth movers, right, aimed at her house. And she couldn't find a place to live. And so I came back from LA to help her find a place to live in the early 70s. So, but the organizing that saved the rest of what was left in that community, although a lot of it is gone, I go downtown and it's gentrified and all of these housing apartments that I know [Speaking Spanish] cannot afford, you know. It is quite different, you know, but at the time, you know, I think that that was going on. I think the struggle to save that neighborhood was one of the biggest impacts that the Movimiento had. I think in terms of education. You know, my kids went to the early bilingual programs, although the funding for those programs were always being snatched out of our hands. I think a lot of, you know, really, like my daughter who's second generation and my son, the two oldest ones, speak Spanish. Not fluently, but it's amazing that they do. And I think it's because they were part of those early movements, right. They saw something reflected around themselves that helped them hang on to something in terms of culture. I think that, I see that there is a, when we look around, we see the effect of the muralist of the artist, the impact that Chicanos have had on the state, let's just say, in terms of creating presence, marking presence, even if it's only through murals. But also marking communities, the activity that the Movimiento started that is, I think, still alive in some sense, you know. Like I know people keep trying to knock it off. Historians say, well, it ended somewhere in the 70s, the Movimiento. And I keep saying, well, it all depends on how you look at it, right. What is it really if you think about it? But I believe that, you know, we can see that after 50 years, we're just getting started. I mean nothing happens overnight, nothing. Nothing happens without generations. I think the challenge has been, you know, to recognize, you know, what continues to be so. So I think that the Movimiento, you know, besides allowing us

consciousness, allowing us to see ourselves reflected, which we didn't, we didn't see ourselves reflected as children. You know, I remember that the only place that we saw ourselves outside of our homes was when we'd go to the vilase [phonetic]. You know, I know Senora Cobb, Alberta [phonetic] Cobb since I was a kid. She was the dance teacher to two of my best friends. So I'd sometimes go along with them. Folklorico was the first experience of Mexicano-ness outside of our homes. I mean, besides us going to church or, but in terms of culture, there was nothing to read. There was nothing to look at. There was nothing on television. So you really, the only thing you're holding on to is that you belong to a family, and you belong to a community. And so as the community began to be attacked, you know, you know, I remember going to the courthouse when I was a little kid because I thought that was my playground. I'd go up there so many blocks from my house, so I'd run up to the courthouse and I was running through there, and I saw a big display of Sacramento. Kind of one of those architectural designs, displays, little buildings. I found my street, and my house wasn't there. And I ran home, and I told my mom, our house isn't there anymore. And I realized in the future, we would not be there. The plan was for us not to be there. I remember talking about it with my teachers, and everybody was talking about progress, but nobody, I felt like that little story, right, about the, you know, the little bird, you know, talking the sky is falling. Because you know, you're seeing that you're not there. And you realize that, I think, in terms of our own experience that we still experience that sense of being disappeared all the time, you know. So I think the Movimiento provided a, provided ground and provided reflection for us that I think is still important.

[00:58:38]

Riviera So in recognition of the Movimiento activists who have passed on, any Movimiento activists that have that have passed on, can you identify meaning that you, [inaudible].

[00:58:54]

Rodriguez Well, we just lost Dr. Cintli, Roberto Rodriguez, a scholar of, you know, Chicano history and culture. Or I should say Chicano indigenous history and culture. Like really looking for place. Looking to document, you know, our movement across this continent over 60,000 years. Sometimes I'm reminded that the movement didn't start in 1964 but that we've been moving on this continent for as long as, you know, as there have been human beings here. We are the result of that human activity in this time. So I think about Roberto Cintli right now, Cintli, so I haven't even, it just happened last week, just last week. July 31st. Dr. Cintli, of course. Jose has passed.

[00:59:48]

Riviera Jose who?

[00:59:49]

Rodriguez Excuse me. I always think there's only one Jose in the world. Jose Montoya, Yolanda Lopez, artist in San Francisco has just passed, not last year. That was quite a loss in terms of her brilliance and her work. I mean, right now I can't, the names are not

coming to me, but those are the, those are the losses we've just experienced. There's just so many that, you know, in this post-COVID time in a way that I never, I could never has, it seems like accelerated, right, because we've lost so many people. And loss has been predominant in our in our consciousness. So I could, you know, go down the line, all the folks that have left in our generations, yeah.

[01:00:39]

Riviera So looking back at your experience in the Movimiento, are there any issues that were left unresolved?

[01:00:51]

Rodriguez Well, the great majority of them. I mean that's what I'm saying in terms of Movimiento, when we think of Movimiento and we think of resolution, we ask ourselves, are we in a just society? Do we experience, you know, full, you know, benefits of the work that has been accomplished in this, in this society. Now I was telling my tio because we, you know, we always have our last not so much argument anymore. He's 90 years old now. So he's a little less aggressive.

[01:01:21]

Riviera What's your tio's name?

[01:01:22]

Rodriguez Ernesto Garcia. Yeah, so I was talking to my tio, and we were talking about not voting for Trump. I'm like tio, if you love me, please do not vote for Trump this time. I mean, I'm saying it that way because if you do, you're going to find me in the nut house. I'm going to go crazy. I can't see that man's face, hear his voice, and he's killing us tio, just know that. you know, so if you can't vote, you know, if you can't vote for him, if you're going to vote, don't vote. The first time I tell anybody, don't vote. But I told my tio, as he was talking to me, that he benefited from all the struggle and activism of the 1930s and 40s. All those folks who fought for, you know, for social security, for veterans, benefits for, you know, for, you know, unions, because my uncle is a union person. And I said, was he aware of how what's happened to unions? Because I don't think he's aware of the diminishment of the power of union. And so I said, he sits pretty good. He's got a lot of support. He's retired. He has benefits, insurance, you know, pension, all the things those folks fought for. I said so now it's kind of our turn. Like, what are we fighting for, for the future, you know. And what we have is all these diminished, we've been returned back again. We've lost rights, we've lost civil rights. You know the loss of, you know, Roe versus Wade, the, you know, the loss of affirmative action. The continuous, you know, lack of progress on immigration policies. I mean, it's not like the movement happened and we, you know, won all of these, you know, new laws that protect us. The laws that that we have been able to garner are under contention. And have never really served us fully, you know. And as Mexicanos especially, we have special issues and special ways that we experience racism. You know, so when you ask, you know, has the Movimiento resulted, it's resulted in our consciousness that we understand that we can

engage in and should change policy. That we should have access to government. That we should be active in that discussion. But in terms of change, I think we have a lot of work ahead of us. That has not ended. And I'm a little concerned about it, you know, because we, you know, because we have, as we're getting more and more educated, we're also in some ways I'm not sure if we're as conscious about the worth of our activism. About what it means to motivate and what it means to move, not just accept a job and, you know, sort of feel successful within the parameters of that job. So I tell my students just because you get a job at Google doesn't mean that the whole community has benefit. You have a better income, so.

[01:04:30]

Riviera What do you see as a current or future challenges in the Chicano community?

[01:04:38]

Rodriguez Well, just being Chicano, Chicana, Chicano, you know, we have to say all those, all the differences now, Chicana, Chicano, Chicano. Yeah, well, I always say because of my age, I know less about the Chicano than I do about Chicana, Chicano, so I have to leave myself open to learning. I think right now the challenges we've kind of expanded on, on this idea of Chicano, is now we've been hit with this, we have been joined in voice by a lot of indigenous peoples from Mexico. A lot of Central American folks are here. And in terms of, you know, how we define ourselves, there has been this sort of push again toward first [inaudible], you know, Hispanic, but now we've been pushed towards Latinx, which seems to be progressive. But I still think of it as another assimilationist effort. I feel it removes the specificity of our struggle and the specificity of our history. You know, so if we unite, yes, it's interesting culturally that we can join. But at the same time does not speak to the, what it means to have history. Like, who are the communities that border Mexico? And who are the communities that are walking through Mexico? And there's so many issues now, even in terms of race seeing, I see myself as an indigenous, you know, identified Chicano. What does that mean? What does that look like? Politically, a lot of the young people, Chicano studies programs, for instance, are diminishing all over the country. On the good, on the good aspect of it is because students are interested in the environment. They're interested in, they're interested in food justice. They're interested in, you know, health concerns. And they're feeling more confident about entering STEM and all those different areas, which I salute. But in terms of Chicano studies itself, what is it? What does it have to offer for the future? How does it accommodate, you know, the idea and the fact of indigenous concern? So folks who identify as indigenous, native folks from Mexico, who've experienced racism. Deep and prejudice, which exists in all our families as colorism, and, you know, issues about our hair. And, you know, we've always been taught, you know, that to progress we have to leave behind all of those concerns about culture, which includes in Mexico means leave behind your community and any connection you have to being a native person. Because it will only hold you back, you know. I think all of those are concerns that are experienced now by young people that are coming here and by Central American folks who feel like this isn't not only, and they also have experienced prejudice, you know,

from Mexicanos. Just in the same way that we Mexicanos were prejudice against the undocumented members of our community, now we're experiencing this sort of tension. And that has yet to, that is being articulated, needs to be articulated and may not be pleasant to hear. And sometimes it gets really personal, and sometimes I don't agree. But I keep trying to shut up, you know, to listen and see what's developing. And it's developing faster than I can take it in. So, as Chicanx, as Chicanas, Chicano, I identify that way out of solidarity with the movement. I look at its origin. And I think we're talking about a group of young people who in the midst of a very racialized state, declared themselves to be. They declared themselves to be. And that's not an easy thing to do, to stand and call attention to yourself. When you read Octavio Paz, and he's appalled. How can these folks, you know, call attention to themselves. And basically naming ourselves, you know, Chicana meant you called attention to yourself and you owned your own self. And you and you stood in the face of everything that was pushing you toward assimilation. So now that history isn't exactly told in that manner in all places. And some of the folks teaching don't necessarily agree. And so we have this, I guess my fear right now is where are we going? Have we stopped to ask ourselves that question? Have we stopped to ask that question in our community? And what is the answer, and what does that mean? You know, do we, you know, hold on in any way we can? Well, in my age, I think I'm loyal to this, to this fact, to this, to this history. To you know how it is that I move through the world. I can't expect that everybody will be, you know. I'm hoping that there's relevance in the work. I'm hoping that we can think of ourselves generationally rather than this movement began and ended in such a date, and now this is something new. I would rather see us as part of the last 60,000 years rather than the last 50.

[01:09:53]

Riviera Thank you. Last question, do you see yourself staying involved in meeting these challenges?

[01:10:01]

Rodriguez Well, I'm still teaching. I'm still making art. I'm hoping to retire from teaching, at least in the classroom. I still teach at the University of California in Santa Barbara in Chicanx studies. And I have an organization that I'm cofounder with my partner, Cherrie Moraga, which is Las Maestras Center for Chicana Indigenous Thought, Art and Social Practice, so

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[01:10:26]

Riviera Is that here in Sacramento?

[01:10:27]

Rodriguez Noo, that's in Santa Barbara. Well, it might be, we don't know yet if the school is going to continue our research once we're gone. The center has been sort of the result of our research. And so as we're looking to retire from the active teaching to being able to get back to our own work, and my partner is a writer, and I'm still making art. I think that we're still, you know, very much involved in one way or another. I don't think that's

going to end soon because I can't see that we're going to separate ourselves from our lives. I don't know. There's so many things to struggle around. I mean, geez, when you ask about the passing of the activists and I'm seeing my friends as they get older, you know, the effect of healthcare, you know, diabetes and heart and blood pressure issues. You know the inflammation of the body and cancers and, you know, my friends are struggling and they're not necessarily all in a good place in terms of their retirement. You know, in terms of healthcare, in terms of, you know, housing and so, no, that's not over. We're still in the midst of just the same struggle that we've been in, you know. Yeah.

[01:11:46]

Riviera Thank you very much for the [inaudible].

[01:11:50]

Rodriguez Thank you.

[01:11:50]

Riviera And I learned a lot.

[01:11:51]

Rodriguez Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Theresa.