

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Oral History Project

Richard Rodriguez

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Rhonda Rios Kravitz

Date of interview: July 26 2023

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

California State University, Sacramento Library

[00:00:17]

Rios Kravitz Richard, this interview will be video-audio recorded and will form part of the Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Project Oral History. It's archived at the Donnell & Beverly Gerth Special Collections & University Archives at CSUS. Do you agree to this recording?

[00:00:37]

Richard Rodriguez Yes, I do.

[00:00:38]

Rios Kravitz The date of the interview is July 26, 2023. The time of the interview is 9:30 am. And the location is Sacramento, California. Please state your full name and spell it.

[00:00:55]

Rodriguez Richard Chavez Rodriguez. R-I-C-H-A-R-D C-H-A-V-E-Z R-O-D-R-I-G-U-E-Z.

[00:01:10]

Rios Kravitz Can you provide your birthdate, month, date and year?

[00:01:14]

Rodriguez July 2, 1955.

[00:01:18]

Rios Kravitz Where were you born?

[00:01:19]

Rodriguez San Antonio, Texas.

[00:01:21]

Rios Kravitz Where were you raised?

[00:01:23]

Rodriguez Mostly Sacramento, although I spent the first eight years at Fort Worth, Texas, when we moved to Sacramento.

[00:01:31]

Rios Kravitz What did your parents do for living?

[00:01:34]

Rodriguez My dad worked for the civil service for the army depot first in San Antonio and then Fort Worth and then finally Sacramento from where he retired. He was a radio technician.

[00:01:48]

Rios Kravitz How many brothers and sisters do you have?

[00:01:52]

Rodriguez I have two brothers, one deceased, two sisters.

[00:01:56]

Rios Kravitz What was your primary language growing up?

[00:01:59]

Rodriguez Mostly English.

[00:02:01]

Rios Kravitz Can you describe your experiences as a child and youth in your family and your neighborhood?

[00:02:08]

Rodriguez I think I had a kind of really normal childhood, no real drama. I had great, great parents. They are great nurturers and caregivers and examples. I did the normal things that any kid would do, not a whole lot of drama. I do remember something kind of particular to my upbringing is that in Fort Worth and then in Sacramento, I grew up in largely Anglo initially communities, but we always maintained a real strong tie to our roots in San Antonio. So I think that made a great impression on me periodically going back to San Antonio and kind of getting an infusion of the culture I came from. That was a remarkable time and it left a lasting impression. But as far as, you know, childhood pretty well adjusted, had brothers, had sisters, sibling rivalries, playing football in the street, you know, playing doorbell ditching at night, that kind of stuff.

[00:03:19]

Rios Kravitz Did you or your family experience any discrimination?

[00:03:22]

Rodriguez I was just talking about that to one of my cousins who I just visited. There was one time that I remember I felt the brush of discrimination, though it was indirectly. My father and his brother, Mateo Cosme [assumed spelling], we often went to Corpus Christi when we were in Texas visiting for a little, you know, weekend at the beach. And I remember we just drove there and then looked for places to stay on the beach. And I remember one time both my dad and -- particularly Mateo Cosme came back agitated, very angry. At the time, we asked them what was wrong. They didn't want to talk about it. They just drove away. Of course, later it was learned that the innkeeper or the hotel manager, he refused to serve Mexicans. He didn't rent to Mexicans. And another time, probably I was older living in Sacramento, I took a friend of a friend to a junior prom. And then, when I met her father, he was visibly shaken because I was Mexican. He could -- it was not very subtle at all. But other than that, I think I have been pretty well blessed, you know, except for the occasional stare, the glare that we all seem to get every once in a while.

[00:04:50]

Rios Kravitz What are your earliest memories of events that attracted you to Movimiento?

[00:04:58]

Rodriguez Well, I believe throughout high school, I remained pretty isolated from El Movimiento, but not from my culture. Given that recurrent infusion of this Tejano life, right? It's something I grew up. And it's almost like parallel worlds. There are two different worlds definitely. So I had the experience, but I don't think I had the intellectual articulation of what that was until I attended a class in junior college, and I met a professor there, Juan Carrillo [assumed spelling], who has been interviewed. And he put together a class that was sociology, you know, 49 or something like that. But it was about the Mexican American experience. Interestingly enough, I don't know if I would have taken that class, that I had a real active interest in that in retrospect, but I happen to be attending a Spanish class. I hear a voice behind me, "Hey, Richard," and I turn around and it's a gentleman by the name of Carlos Garza. Carlos Garza shared -- his life story was similar to ours because he worked with my dad in San Antonio. When they closed that facility, he followed to Fort Worth and when they closed the one in Fort Worth, Texas, he moved to me in Sacramento. So when we first, as, you know, immigrants to Sacramento from the army depot, his friends, my parents, and you know, Mexicanos, they kind of stick together and reinforce each other. We spent a lot of time growing up with him. I hadn't seen him in years. And I say, "Carlos, what's going on?" And he started telling me about this class that Carrillo was teaching and said it was really good, I should go, teacher school, this or that, I should check it out. So it was actually a part of his recommendation that I did. And I think that was quite the transformational experience because in the context of what it meant to be a Chicano, meaning other people that were in similar circumstances that feeling of being neither here nor there when it comes to Anglo versus Mexican, you were in your own little zone. That was very inspirationally significant for me during that time. That was probably 1974 I'm thinking. So I was like, my second year in college, I was 19, maybe.

[00:07:39]

Rios Kravitz How can other Mexicans, Mexican Americans, Latinos react to the term Chicano?

[00:07:48]

Rodriguez That's a kind of a difficult question because I'm not sure what context now or back then or --

[00:07:58]

Rios Kravitz Well, you can answer it however, back then, now.

[00:08:00]

Rodriguez Well, personally, it's probably the easiest answer, I thought it fit like a glove. I thought the whole idea of the Chicano movement and what it was to be a Chicano. It was very relatable to me. I was enthusiastic about it, like somewhat -- what's the word I'm looking for? I often use it to describe myself in a sense used to describe myself. As far as other people, you know, I think my parents were somewhat -- they were understanding but you know, they were, say, hey, somos Mexicanos. They are really into Mexicanos. They never call themselves Mexican Americans. They call themselves Mexicanos. Very proud of it. Chicano was, I think, a term they probably were familiar with, but with what I was bringing to the table about it and my activism and doing things like festivals and fairs and educational seminars, they understood it. And since then, I have been a pretty strong proponent of the term as opposed to other terms that are being used now to kind of generalize us, put us together. But I get into pretty -- I don't know, if it's heated but pretty adamant arguments about the word Chicano versus Hispanic or Latino or Latinx. That's who I am. I consider myself a Chicano. There is not going to be many people who are going to change that point of view for me.

[00:09:35]

Rios Kravitz Had you heard of the civil rights movement at the time? And if yes, what were your thoughts about it?

[00:09:44]

Rodriguez Well, growing up in Fort Worth, Texas, you couldn't be immune to the news, reels and, you know, 5 o'clock news and the tapes and the videos of people getting hosed on and people getting lynched, and so on and so forth. But I always considered it in the context of African Americans. I felt a little sorry for African Americans. I had an empathy for them because they had it tough, but I didn't really think that applied to us, although in retrospect, I'm sure it did. Something that we did when we moved, my dad did when we moved to Fort Worth. He wasn't a hunter. I mean, but he wasn't a gun enthusiast at all but he always had a shotgun in the hall closet facing the door. And when I asked him what it was, he would, you know, poo poo, and he said, oh, that's just something that Theo [assumed spelling] has, I'm storing for him or whatever. It wasn't until I was an adult that I figured out my dad brought that shotgun for protection, because I wasn't

aware of it, he certainly was aware of the prejudices and discriminations that was afforded to Mexicans living in a White community. There maybe four Mexicans on our block in Fort Worth. And of course, we all aligned and met together but that was something that were revealing aspect of my father. He too was prepared to protect his family and he knew the risks that were associated with living in a predominantly White community. Probably it wasn't until I became educated in the history of Mexicans and other people of color in the United States that I recognized discrimination.

[00:11:40]

Rios Kravitz Can you talk about it? Do you want to expound a little more about -- can you identify any connections to the Movimiento with civil rights?

[00:11:52]

Rodriguez Not when I was living in Texas. I mean, it wasn't really a strong cognitive awareness at that time. But of course, when you go to school and you read more, you are exposed to more things. I'm talking about college. It meshed together. I mean, it was all right there. You know, you learned the history of your people, the stuff, the history that wasn't taught in primary school or high school, but the history that's been out there and you learned about leaders and about pioneers, you know, all the way back to the organizers in Arizona and the farmworkers, [foreign language] worker. So you learned a lot about it. And then, you tie things together that you somewhat had an awareness. I think, in Texas, that model is stronger because Texas, when I was going there and visiting, it was a very, very segregated town. I wasn't aware of segregation because we stayed in our segregated area. We didn't have to go beyond that. And it was pretty clearly segregated. You'd Mexicans on the west side, Blacks on the east side, and Whites on the north side. And I remember when I was like a young man, when you ventured outside and you kind of confronted, you know, the whiteness of that city, it was a little hostile. So that, of course, translates into awareness and understanding of why people advocate for equality and civil rights and, you know, justice in all fields, education, housing, neighborhoods, health. So I think I might have had a lot of the raw stuff, have been exposed to a lot of raw images and experiences, but it wasn't processed until I could learn more about it and then articulate it myself. [Background Conversations] I'll take this opportunity to get the sniffles out.

[00:14:09]

Rios Kravitz You are doing great.

[00:14:10]

Rodriguez Am I mumbling?

[00:14:11]

Unknown No. No. You're doing good.

[00:14:14]

Rios Kravitz No, no. Very good. I'm learning a lot. [Silence]

[00:14:35]

Rodriguez These lights are too much.

[00:14:36]

Rios Kravitz I know.

[00:14:36]

Rodriguez It's like I'm blinded. So these are your lights do?

[00:14:50]

Unknown Yeah.

[00:14:51]

Rodriguez I know. Did you get it when you go to school? [Background Conversations]

[00:15:19]

Rios Kravitz Were you in the Mexican American Education Project?

[00:15:22]

Rodriguez This is an easy question because I was not. So that takes care of like the next two questions. Although I was very, very aware of it because Juan [inaudible] was and he educated us about it. And I have to say given the efforts and the work that a lot of those individuals have done, and the changes that they have implemented that persist to this day, it's an absolute shame that there is not anything like that today. It's tragic, actually. It's tragic, because that was a great group of individuals, you know, of whom I'm just exposed to just a small portion, but they were really pioneers and advocates. And they were really good at it. So they changed a lot of people's lives and they had an impact on a lot of issues and educational systems and changing the people's lives, empowerment. It's kind of overused word, but they certainly did that. And it's tragic that nothing like that is being maintained.

[00:16:51]

Rios Kravitz Did your knowledge of cultural issues influence your involvement and participation in Movimiento?

[00:16:59]

Rodriguez Well, could you repeat the question?

[00:17:02]

Rios Kravitz Sure. Did your knowledge of cultural issues influence your involvement and participation in Movimiento?

[00:17:09]

Rodriguez Depends on what you mean by cultural issues. If you mean just day in and day out aspects and absorbing a culture, though that experience certainly served as a nexus to connect with something that's larger, I mean, you know -- I, again, with my infusion or my constant connection with San Antonio, there was a lot of cultural aspects of my life that I was made aware of, from family to events to parties to music, music was a big, big part of my cultural appetite, I guess. With all those things that you experienced, you kind of experienced a commonality of who you are as a person, and how unique you are to other groups. And a pride of knowing that, you know, plain loteria when I was 5 or 6 years old, you know. And then knowing that that's something that everybody does, you know, knowing Mexican candy, knowing music that you changed the channel when you are tired of listening to it but, you know, some of the classic folks that you will later get acquainted. So I think there was a fertile bed of cultural experiences upon which to build a larger cultural awareness of how the idea of culture impacts aspects of civil rights and advocacy for change and self-knowledge and self-empowerment. So I think growing up, there is a lot of raw experiences that again get distilled as you learn more about it, but you've got to get pushed to learn about it. You just can't take advantage of it. You have to see those experiences in the context of what else is happening in the world. Some people never make those connections. That's okay. I did.

[00:19:14]

Rios Kravitz You have been talking about you need to be pushed. Can you talk about how that push really helped your participation in the Movimiento?

[00:19:24]

Rodriguez Well, again, back to that cultural mixed American, I forget the -- Mexican American experience, I think is the name of the class. Knowing that there is a whole group of other people that felt that same isolation from the dominant culture. They are neither Mexican, neither White, you know, getting teased by for not speaking your language or getting teased because you have a funny last name and you say your R is different than someone else, you know. And knowing that that was a shared experience prompted me to learn more personally. And I chose to change my major so that instead of going into drafting and architecture, I wanted to learn more about history. And the more you dug into your history, the more expansive your mind was, I believe. I found out I really had a propensity to learn history and I kind of delved into it full force. I think that class was part of the pushing me to learn more. And again, it was a very activist class, we just didn't sit in the class and read books, you know. We went here, went there, went to see murals in San Francisco, sponsored cultural affair projects in the campus and went to art shows and a lot of the things that Chicanos do in high school, we did.

[00:21:03]

Rios Kravitz Did the --

[00:21:04]

Rodriguez Excuse me, in college [laughter].

[00:21:08]

Rios Kravitz Did your personal involvement in the Movimiento change personally? And if yes, can you explain how that changed you?

[00:21:19]

Rodriguez I think if -- changed me. I think it's like looking at the world through a brand new set of glasses. I mean, it influenced my political awareness, my opinions. I always knew, and this is what I tell my grandkids to this day, my kids and then my grandkids, of which I have 11, that there is always another side. Don't always buy what they tell you in school. Go look behind, look behind the story and learn more about what is going on because you are not getting the full story. And I think that advice comes from being -- experiencing one version of things and then delving into and seeing there is a completely different version, you know. I recently came back from Texas just a little while ago last week, and I took this opportunity to take my two teenage granddaughters. They are leaving eighth grade and going into high school. One lives in Northern California here in Sacramento. For a while, I was debating whether I really want to go, invest my time and money and you know, how are they going to fit being 14-year-olds. But I really wanted them to see that part of them, where they came, what made them who they are now. And I also had to do a little politicizing. I go to the Alamo, and because there is construction going on, we can only get a little glimpse of it without getting off and walk into it. So I tell them, and I go, this the perfect view of the Alamo because it's not the full thing because there is a story, you know, these people were fighting, these, you know, liberty fighters were fighting for the right to own other people. So all this hoopla about Cradle of Texas Liberty, it's a bunch of hooey, as my mom used to say, a bunch of hooey. And I don't think they are going to really appreciate it. You know, yeah, grandpa, snoring, you know, when I started proselytizing, but those are seeds. And as I have had seeds that were later nurtured and developed, they will remember that because I keep doing that. I keep telling them that look beyond what you see because there is an education that you have to figure out for yourself that's not going to be told to you. And it's not always as pretty as, you know, Fess Parker playing Davy Crockett.

[00:24:04]

Rios Kravitz What roles do you believe that Chicanos played in Movimiento?

[00:24:10]

Rodriguez This is a tricky area because I don't want to sound -- what's the word I'm looking for? I don't want to sound flippant, but I don't think it would have happened without women. Because women were some of the hardest workers. They were always busy. I always thought, you want something then, ask a lady to do it because they are very, very focused. And men do get a lot of the -- you know, men do get a lot of the credit because they do like to take charge and stand out and, you know, be the front person of

whatever is going on. But I think without women's involvement there, there wouldn't be a Chicano movement. My great grandmother was a single woman living in San Antonio early 1900s. And it was she who convinced my grandfather and grandmother to move to San Antonio because it was the eve of the revolution. She thought there was a better life there. She actually tricked my grandparents into coming because word was out that she was sick and they had to come see her. So they came with my oldest uncle, Apolinar, because she sent out word, we need help, I'm ill. So they took the trek from [inaudible] up to San Antonio on the eve of the revolution, only to find out that she was just kidding [laughs]. Let me get some water. And there were a lot of powerful women in my own family that were instrumental in change in our trajectory, in our life's history. And so was with El Movimiento, I think women are critical in that regards.

[00:26:35]

Rios Kravitz What did you personally initiate or help initiate in the movement?

[00:26:41]

Rodriguez What did I personally initiate? I always thought myself as more of a soldier than an organizer. I helped with festivals, I helped with cultural events. I served on the cultural affairs committee, which was a CETA program, which formalized festivals and historical events from a Chicano's perspective and helped organize those events. I was more of a worker than an instigator. Although I have to say, when I left Sacramento for an employment, I kind of got into a different environment. But even then, when I was in different environments often sought out, you know, where are the Latinos around? Where are the Chicanos around? For example, when I worked for a natural resource agency, a department called the California Conservation Corps, and this is in Northern California, not many Chicanos in Northern California, but there are some, especially in the forest service. I sought out and became involved with a cadre of Latino Lartejanos [phonetic] forest service employees that advocated for more Latinos in the natural resource field, which it was abundantly apparent that that's what was needed. So I would meet with them, I would help sponsor events with them, I would do outreach with them. Same thing, later in my career I worked for Pacific Gas & Electric as a safety instructor. And while at PG&E, I sought out similar minded folks that advocated for Latino causes and found a group that actually sponsored events for fundraisers and events for scholarships for Latinos and got involved in interviewing, recruiting, awarding, celebrating those recipients. So I think it became kind of like part of my DNA to always look for kindred spirits and do what I could to elevate and progress those kind of similar aspirations in people, you know, in the same way I was kind of shown a whole different approach on life. So that's what I think I've helped with, you know, helped promote, continue and advocate. But as far as initiatives, there is a lot of brilliant people here. I appreciate and respect the initiatives they develop and I'm willing to participate.

[00:29:43]

Rios Kravitz Are there specific organizations that you can name that you were involved in?

[00:29:48]

Rodriguez Sure. I was a machista from my first time at Cosumnes River College and at Sac State. You know I did do one thing that now you mentioned that, I helped organize the Latino graduation, when I graduated from Sac State, I was scheduled to graduate from Sac State in 1981. I along with the help of a fellow, not only graduate, but family friend, Elizabeth Montoya helped organize a Chicano graduation. And it had been -- my understanding is that they had Chicano graduations before but it kind of died out. But we put together a nice little event that honored the parents of the Chicano graduates and had a nice program, dinner, drink stands. And I remember the first meeting I held at Sac State, there was nobody showed up. I thought, oh, God, this is a bummer. But it turned out to be quite a successful event. So that is one thing that I did and that was in the confines of Sac State's mansion. I was involved heavily with La Raza Bookstore as a volunteer. That was a real formative period, because I loved books and working there kind of exposed to me a whole lot of material that kind of like a lot of third world awareness. And knowing that Chicano movement was tied to a lot of other struggles across the globe and how the corporate industrial complex was really kind of polluting the world. And I have to give credit to Deta Romo [assumed spelling]. She was a great buyer. So she got a lot of newsletters, a lot of books, a lot of pamphlets that while just volunteering selling books I would avail myself of, and that was a great awakening for me. So I did a lot of things for them. The bookstore used to have fundraisers, dances and things like that. But it probably was the most -- it was an organization that I was most active for while I was here in Sacramento. I mean, there is other ones that I can't think of right now but I can say and I was pretty much, I consider myself a worker, you know, how can I help? You know, what can I do? Serving beer to 3,000 Chicanos at Southside Park, I can do that, you know.

[00:32:31]

Rios Kravitz How did these organizations contribute to Movimiento, what would you say?

[00:32:36]

Rodriguez How do they contribute? Wow.

[00:32:39]

Rios Kravitz The activities, organization.

[00:32:41]

Rodriguez I think they provided a rallying point, a place to coalesce, a place to familiarize us with one another, to share common interest, to maintain a strong culture identity, to advocate for causes, to organize for anti-Baqi [phonetic], you know, protests that are going on, farm worker rights. So I think in a sense, they were social vehicles to make significant changes in a movement. They were gathering points. You could have fun and you could also do something constructive and worthwhile and something that was highly needed. So they are different than a lot of the other social clubs that might

socialize just for its own sake. I think there always was a tinge of we can socialize, but we have to do something that's important.

[00:33:53]

Rios Kravitz Building on that, did the Movimiento raise your consciousness regarding social, cultural, and political issues? If so, how?

[00:34:02]

Rodriguez Well, as I said before, what I tell my grandkids there is always another story. And I think the Movimiento was really instrumental in showing, leading, articulating the other side of the equation, you know, knowing that when Ronald Reagan says, "We are here fighting the Contras," you know, you know what the real scoop is, you know. You know, like DeSantis and Abbott, when they do their charades, you kind of see right through it. And that's a little disheartening and in spite of all the changes that we have advocated for all the causes that we have got behind that there is like the last gasp of unreality when you focus on giving tax cuts to the wealthiest people in the state while you dismiss the people who contribute to building it by putting floating barriers in the river. And so it's a shame that there is that last gasp of reactionary personalities and events. It seems like it's a real battle now, that's why I'm very committed, and interested in young people. I always have had a focus on young people because basically, we are on the downslide of what we need to do. And it has to be taken over by younger people. That was part of the reason I bring my granddaughters to Texas to kind of give them the other experience. So yeah, I think without the movement, I wouldn't have had any of this awareness.

[00:35:53]

Rios Kravitz And just building on what you said now, how did these changes affect your personal relationships with family, peers, and significant others?

[00:36:04]

Rodriguez Well, I probably say that I was the modified Chicano in my family. I mean, people look for me for not only opinions and feedback, but for contributing to the upkeep or the education of their kids. If someone is pursuing a career or an assignment or a book about Chicanos, they come to me. So I'm kind of like the in-house consultant for my family. Peers, again, I make it known that what I believe in. I went to a school that was predominantly, not entirely but predominantly White. And I kind of wear my Chicanismo, you know, like a badge, you know, and I push back when I hear stupid remarks and stupid attitudes. And it's actually, the Movimiento has given me a voice I didn't have otherwise. So I become somewhat known for speaking my mind in situations like that. So I think the Movimiento has given me that courage and that self-awareness to articulate things I really feel are right. I mean, willing to listen to other opinions, but I'm going to be pretty steadfast in my view of the world.

[00:37:36]

Rios Kravitz Can you describe your involvement with the Movimiento and its impact on your career?

[00:37:46]

Rodriguez Well, on my career, I chose a job path that was pretty far from the Movimiento. Like I said I joined a state department that put people to work, young people to work. But then again, I had an impact and influence on young people, and in that regard, it was a gift. I worked at a residential center that brought together different people from all over the state. You had your farm boys from Central Valley, people from the Mission District in San Francisco, from Whites, all over and we had to work together. And that experience actually, I think it elevated my view of the Movimiento. I think it gave me the experience that when advocating for change, it doesn't matter what color you are, it really doesn't. If people can learn to work together, achieve common goals, that's a life experience itself. And then again, if there is some Chicano disillusioned guy, some kind of hard guy comes in and, you know, wants to vent his anger on the organization, I'm able to channel that anger, channel that disillusionment given by their options and show him that there are other ways. And I think that definitely helped me influence others, but at the same time, I could share what I knew about history and my personal situation, economic justice through that venue of working together as a team. So in that way, I was really good I thought at what I was doing. I think it helped me get the job because I talked about team building and common goals in interviews. And I think I was pretty persuasive in telling them, the people that interviewed me that I was adept at community. And I was not ashamed to use my culture as a catalyst for that. So you know, in that affirmative action world, people were anxious to do that. Oh, we got someone who is Chicano, but he is not burning things down, you know. But I did it my own way, you know.

[00:40:20]

Rios Kravitz How would you say the Movimiento impacted community life here in Sacramento where you live?

[00:40:26]

Rodriguez I have to take a pass on that question because I think at the height of it, I guess in the '80s, I basically left. I wasn't around for maybe 20 years. I kept in touch with friends and family here and find out what was going on. But I couldn't really -- I didn't quite have the pulse of what was happening now. In the early years, I think we were pretty revolutionary. We started a lot of trends that I see now in the community that have come together now, in some cases, maybe even commercialized to, you know, sadly, but we did things like the [foreign language], we did things like the [foreign language], we did things like art shows, mural paintings, lot of small seeds. We did collective auto repair shop. And a lot of these things that we kind of -- mercados. We did some of the first mercados in downtown Sacramento that were diverse and showcased local art and talent. And a lot of these things we did before they were really popular items. The Centro de Artistas Chicanos was a real innovator in a lot of things, they tried a lot of different things. But I think, as I left and saw some of the seeds we planted, come back and see

how they formed into trends and practices, it's pretty impressive. So I think we probably were just trying a lot of things, see what works, throw on the wall and see if it sticks. There was a lot of that in the '70s. And I have to say we were a pretty innovative group. We meaning local Chicano community in Sacramento.

[00:42:34]

Rios Kravitz Remember some of the people?

[00:42:37]

Rodriguez Yeah. I mentioned one. I really had a lot of respect and admiration for the generals, you know, Jose, Tomas's dad, and Esteban Villa, Rudy Cuellar of course, was a strong influence. Consider him a good friend of mine now. Louis Gonzalez. They were good teachers, good mentors, good wise men of the Chicanos. Richard Favela, [inaudible], Max Garcia, all those people were always around. They are like my, not quite uncles, but older brothers that really, really helped me in my perspective and my evolution. I owe a lot to those people.

[00:43:27]

Rios Kravitz You know, in talking about those people, you know, many have passed on. Can you identify an individual or individuals that you feel had an impact on the Movimiento and explain that significance?

[00:43:46]

Rodriguez There is a lot of them. I mean, I'm somewhat nervous about saying one, not mentioning another. But I have to say that Jose Montoya was, he was a very astute and perceptive man that I wish I could have had more conversations with him, but the ones I had are always illuminating. He had that quiet leadership and always was one to pose challenging questions, but at the same time, nurture you along and help you develop your own potential. I was in just maybe two years in college when I was asked to develop a Chicano experience class for a high school I went to. And I had never done anything, I was young, but I wrote a syllabus, you know, goals and objectives of class and I asked him to read it. And because of all the people I was working around, I would respect whatever he had to say, I really valued his opinion. And he really gave me good comments on that, and I'll never forget what he told me about my work and my progress and the encouragement he gave me. And that was just one little, tiny thing, but he was a pretty wise guy. He was pretty wise and astute and always very helpful and related to me. And there are other snippets of things he would say offhandedly that still resonate with me. You know, so he is definitely somebody that I admire and appreciate, you know. Esteban Villa, the same way, but in a different methodology, so to speak. You know, his vehicle was music and he was a great songwriter, a great musician, great performance, but he was also a very [inaudible] commentator on social issues. I remember one time I was sitting at Luna's with him, and I was agitated about something that was going on, who knows? I get agitated easily sometimes, but it's something political. And I was talking about, you know, taking it to the streets or getting kind of

violent. He goes, "Richard, Richard, calm down." He goes, "The arts are dangerous enough." [laughs] That was a great statement, you know, kind of calm down, you know, impede a young pilot, but a lot of those little phrases, little folkisms [phonetic] resonated with me. He is still around, but he has also provided a lot of vision and context for me. Ricardo Favela was a great coach and teacher. I always appreciate his – I mean, these guys were all -- I mean, I could say something about all of them. But they were as a whole, very, very instrumental in who I am now, today. I won't mention one because he is not – he is still with us but he was a great guide, and a great teacher also, opened up my mind more than I can really ever articulate, I think.

[00:47:20]

Rios Kravitz And you probably talked about this a little bit. But looking back at your experience at Movimiento, are there any issues that are left unresolved?

[00:47:31]

Rodriguez Of course, it would move. That's what Movimiento was about. It's a movement. You know, it's the juxtaposition of what is and what can be, you know, and you can't, if you are satisfied, you think that's all there is, then you are going to go nowhere. Movement is, I have always thought of it, thanks to people like Jose, that we are in a continual struggle. And if you look around today, I mean, there has to be movement to battle this backlash. I mean, this society, you know, they want our chile on their Cheetos, you know, and they market as theirs, but they don't want us. You know, sweat, we were bullets, we would rule the world, we are artists working people around, we are doing the dirty work, we get crap talk and that's unresolved, that needs to be changed. So yeah, there are a lot of results. I mean, there is no movement without conflict. And hopefully, we can always advocate for a better life, for not only us, but for our children and a context to work out that change. So I'd say the movement lives on. It's always going to be going.

[00:49:02]

Rios Kravitz And you have talked a little bit about this too, but what do you see as current or future challenges for the Chicano community today?

[00:49:12]

Rodriguez I believe it's maintaining our uniqueness. I don't want to be grouped together with, you know, the advocacy group of the month. I think the Chicano experience is a very unique experience. It's Mexicans growing up in the United States. We have a unique history, we have a unique experience. We have a tremendous amount of contributions, and we are not acknowledged. I was just thinking about the other day I was having my pet peeve shopping to Safeway last night and there was on the headings of what products were there, it's like Hispanic food sections. It's like, what's wrong with the word Mexican? You know, why are we trying to sanitize that? When we go out and choose where we want to eat, you don't go, "Chinese, let's do Indian, let's do Thai." No one says, "Let's go to a Hispanic restaurant." But I think there is an assault on our uniqueness. There is an

assault on who we are. And I think sometimes Mexicans, Mexicanos are co-conspirators in that. As a Chicano, I'm not. I think we need to speak a little louder and advocate for our uniqueness. Somebody has said that Chicano movement [foreign language], you know, it's over. It's passe. I think it's needed more than ever that consciousness of uniqueness and apartness and very important agents of change. I mean, I want to teach my kids to know that they are Chicanos, although they think they're something else. So that's to me a big issue, you know, is maintaining our uniqueness and our individuality to advocate and facilitate change in the society.

[00:51:30]

Rios Kravitz And this is the last question. How do you see yourself staying involved in meeting these challenges?

[00:51:39]

Rodriguez My children. So I want my grandchildren, my children, you know, gone are the days where we are going to go to a demonstration a week kind of thing. We are just too busy. That's the natural progression of life, you know. We have children, we have interest. We are nurturing them, we are leading them, we are taking them to basketball practice, you know. So they are the people who we are most in contact with. And I think they need to develop that same kind of conscious. I think about myself, I really wasn't aware of all this stuff when I was 12, 13, 14. I was just growing up. But there is a lot of seeds that are laid down. And my experience tells me that oh, back then when we did this or we did that, that's what was happening. You know, you are experiencing something, you are not necessarily gaining anything from it right away. It needs to be fermented a little bit in your mind. And I think that's what I want to do with my kids. I kind of just want to expose them, want to talk to them, look for the right moment when they want to talk about something. When they ask questions, you will listen to them and you give them your perspective. That's all you can do. You know, be the change you seek in others. That's what I'm trying to do now. That's how I think the Movimiento is going to survive.

[00:53:10]

Rios Kravitz Well, that was it. I just want to say thank you.

[00:53:13]

Rodriguez You are quite welcome. Thank you for the opportunity. And Tomas, the tech behind the camera.

[00:53:20]

Rios Kravitz Yeah, we did well.