The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Oral History Project

Rene Aguilera

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by David Rasul
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Transcription by Maya Martinez and Technitype Transcripts

Rasul Would you please state your full name, Rene?

[00:00:09]

Aguilera Yes. My full name is Rene Aguilera.

Rasul And what's your birthdate?

[00:00:15]

Aguilera My birthdate is April 8, 1961.

Rasul And where were you born, Rene?

[00:00:19]

Aguilera I was born in Roseville, California.

Rasul Oh, wow. Do you have any children? Your marital status? What's your marital status, Rene?

[00:00:28]

Aguilera My marital status is single, and I have no children.

Rasul You have no children. Okey dokey. And, again, you said you were born and raised in Roseville, correct?

[00:00:36]

Aguilera Yes.

Rasul What did your parents do for a living?

[00:00:39]

Aguilera My father, he came from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, specifically Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, in 1946 to Roseville, California. At that time, there weren't too many people in Roseville, maybe about six thousand, and probably half of them were Latinos and they were all working on the railroad, the Southern Pacific Railroad. Mainly a lot came from the Bracero Program. But my dad was actually born in the United States, but then during the Depression—he was born in 1927—during Depression, he had to go back to Casas Grandes, Chihuahua. Then he came in '46 as one of the pioneering Latinos that lived in Roseville, and he worked for the railroad for forty-two years.

Rasul Forty-two years. Wow. And your mom, what did your mom do?

[00:01:26]

Aguilera My mom came—she didn't like it at first in Roseville. Of course, she didn't speak too much English, but then she caught on, and she worked in a lot of houses as someone that cleaned houses. She got to know the community, especially some of the more *ricos que estaba en* Roseville, and they helped her out, you know. Churches helped us out. We were kind of a poor family growing up. There was five of us. I was the baby.

Then my mom all of a sudden started taking English classes, as well as my dad. They learned English, and my mom was one of the first bilingual, bicultural translators in the different school districts in the Roseville area.

Rasul Oh, great. What city did you say she came from, from Mexico?

[00:02:10]

Aguilera She was born in Ciudad Juarez, and as a matter of fact, my dad, Jose Pilar, and my mom, Bertha Ochoa, they actually met on the dance floor, because my grandfather, Apolinar Ochoa, he was in a big band. So they would have big bands in Ciudad Juarez, and a lot of people, especially Americans, would come across from the United States, specifically El Paso, and my grandfather and about eight or nine of his brothers would have a big band in Chihuahua.

Rasul Wow. So they met on the dance floor, huh?

[00:02:45]

Aguilera They sure did, yeah. They were great dancers. I wish I could dance as well as them. They were very smooth, especially in those Mexican dances we would have on Sunday nights at Placer County Fairgrounds in Roseville.

Rasul Were there a lot of Mexicanos going to those dances at the Placer County?

[00:03:00]

Aguilera Yes, and, you know, even to this day—this was back in the fifties and sixties—even to this day, there are *jaripeos* in Woodland, there's *jaripeos* in Roseville. There's a lot of Sunday dances because oftentimes Monday is the day off of many Mexicans in this region, so there'd always be some Sunday dances and people would get on their boots and get on their hats and shine up their belts and they'd come out and have a good time.

Rasul And they were called *jaripeos*, huh?

[00:03:26]

Aguilera Yeah, they'd have *jaripeos* and they'd have *tardeadas* like in Royer Park, specifically, off Douglas Boulevard in the center of Roseville, there'd be a Royer Park and they'd have dances out in the park on the concrete area.

Rasul Oh, wow. So you mentioned that you're the youngest of five?

[00:03:44]

Aguilera Yes.

Rasul So what are the ages and names of your other brothers and sisters?

[00:03:48]

Aguilera Well I'm fifty-four. My brother Toddy is the oldest male, and you did have a chance to interview him. He's the president of Café de California. He's sixty-five. My brother Adam's sixty-four, and then my sister

is sixty, and then I have an oldest sister, who was actually born in Ciudad Juarez, Gloria; she's seventy-three. So five of us all graduated from Roseville High School. Three of us, three of the boys were all student body presidents. So that's three student body presidents from Roseville High School from one Latino family.

Rasul Oh, wow. You want to add about that about your youth, growing up in your neighborhood, what the character of the neighborhood was and other things like that?

[00:04:31]

Aguilera Yes. Growing up, we lived, like most Mexicans in Roseville, pretty much close to the tracks, like maybe one or two blocks from the tracks. My dad would work, you know, mainly 8:00 to 5:00. Sometimes he'd do two shifts. Sometimes during his life he'd work overnight maybe from 12:00 to 8:00. We'd always know if he had a good day at work, he'd stop off at the Dainty Pastry, which was this little pastry store across the street from the railroad, and he'd bring in like an apple pie or something and we'd be all happy.

But, mainly, most of the Mexican people were very proud. They had a great work ethic. My dad, like I said, he worked for forty-two years. He was very involved in the International Oilmen and Firemen Union, and he made sure that if someone got hurt or injured at work, he would go to the law firm of Gilwee Mason Rothwell and make sure that they were able to get

some money because, you know, working on the railroad was really tough. It was tough on your back, it was tough on anything, and most of these people that worked at the railroad, they were laborers.

So I had a great life growing up in Roseville. I didn't really have too much racism. I don't think I really had *any* racism, even though as a Mexican growing up, you know, there tended to be, and there still are now, a lot of Caucasian people. Roseville these days had about 20 percent, and nowadays, or back then, it was more than 50 percent.

But I had a great childhood. Luckily, my parents were stable. They weren't farmworkers, where they went from city to city, but we were very stable in living in Roseville. I actually still live in the house that I was—I was born in the Roseville Community Hospital. I came home, and I still live in that house fifty-four years later. [laughs] So I'm pretty well known in the community because I'm on the local school board, and also the Aguilera name is one of the pioneering Hispanic families in the Roseville-Sacramento area.

Rasul That's tremendous. So you kicked out your brothers and sisters and kept the house, huh? [laughs]

[00:06:37]

Aguilera Actually, no. My two sisters was living with me because I thought that was the right thing to do, and my two brothers, they're married, so I asked my two sisters to live with me. They were living in Sacramento, and then one got married on me, like, two years ago, so she had to move away

[laughs], but only two blocks away, because my dad, during his time of working for the railroad, he was able to own some houses, so that's always a good thing to have houses. So, luckily, we are a very close family and, you know, I love my brothers and sisters and we all work for the community and do things for the community.

Rasul That's great. Were you a Fellow, Felito, or were you actually involved in the Mexican American Education Project? If you were not, were you aware of the project mission?

[00:07:23]

Aguilera No, I was not aware. Maybe that was before my time. I talked to my brother Toddy about it, and I'm not sure if he was involved in it, but it sounded like a good project. Is it still going on, or can you tell me a little bit about it, just so I can know?

Rasul It's not going on anymore. It was during that time it was retraining teachers to go out and work with the community.

[00:07:42]

Aguilera Oh, okay.

Rasul Teachers were already in the field teaching.

[00:07:46]

Aguilera Oh, okay.

Rasul So it created a lot of forward-looking theory on working with Chicano students in education, so it was a very powerful project.

[00:07:56]

Aguilera Wow! That sounds like something maybe José Montoya might have been in, or maybe Esteban Villa.

Rasul Yes, they're both Felitos, yes.

[00:08:02]

Aguilera That would've been a great project to be involved in.

Rasul So I know you weren't involved with that, but in looking at your education and being introduced to cultural anthropology, which is, again, our music, our values, our culture, how has that influenced you?

[00:08:21]

Aguilera Well, like most of us, we're first influenced by my parents, so my dad's work ethic, you know, really played a part in what I did growing up, especially in jobs that I've attained, as well as my mother. Later on after my mother retired in the school district from being a translator and a bilingual community person, she actually caught on with the Placer County Migrant Farmworker Program, where it was her job—and at this time there was more agricultural land in Placer County than there is now—she would go out into the nurseries or where there were turkey farms or pistachio farms and she would make sure that if there were children out in the fields, that she would make sure that would get enrolled in schools.

So I would follow her. So I would see that my dad worked hard, I would see that my mom was a community person, so growing up, as early as

eighth grade, I ran for student body president at Warren T. Eich public school, and I was student body president. And then when I was in high school, despite the fact there were probably more Caucasians than Latinos, you know, I tried to reach out to everybody and I ran for student body president and I was there.

You know, growing up, I was pretty much involved in different organizations. My parents actually started an organization called MASA, Mexican American Scholarship Association. One of the students was Francisco Hernandez, who actually graduated from Roseville High School. He told me years later that he really enjoyed getting that scholarship that propelled him to go Sierra College, then UC Berkeley and then on to being a dean at UC Berkeley and then at UC Santa Cruz and then at the University of Manila.

So, my parents, they, as well as other Hispanic pioneering families like the Tapias and the Durans, they started this MASA. So, even early on, I knew that I wanted to build upon the legacy of my parents. So I started an organization myself that kind of went off that, called the Hispanic Empowerment Association, and by the year 2000, we started doing like Dieciseis de Diciembre events, we did Cinco de Mayo events, and then we started a Cesar Chavez Youth Leadership Conference. So, growing up, I saw that my parents were very involved and other families were very involved, so I think that's how I learned that I wanted to be involved in public service. But mainly through middle school, high school, and then I went to University of

California, Davis, that was, you know, Chicano history in itself, you know, finding out about the grape boycotts, and the different protests they were having there, learning about at that time DQU, Deganawidah-Quetzalcoatl University, with Dennis Banks, the chancellor there. So I lived a lot through the late sixties and the early seventies of Chicano history.

Rasul And you're leaking into the next question which was what are your earliest memories of events that attracted you to the Movimiento Chicano, and how do other Mexican American Latinos—oh, I'm sorry, just that part right there. What were the events that attracted you to Movimiento Chicano?

[00:11:42]

Aguilera In the early sixties, I was only like maybe ten or eleven years old, but there were already activities of the United Farm Workers reaching into Placer County, Sacramento County, Yolo County, Sutter County, which is my area, upper Northern California, and I remember Cesar Chavez coming to Royer Park in Roseville and doing protests, early protests, regarding pesticides, regarding United Farm Worker activities that he wanted to highlight. At that time, the grape boycott was starting to get some press and Ronald Reagan was the president—was the governor [laughs] in those early seventies, so it hit Roseville, Placer County.

I met a man by the name of Rudy Cuellar, Sr., and I think on the list that you've interviewed Rudy Cuellar, Jr. Mr. Cuellar, he had a newspaper

and he was very involved in, like, MAPA, the Mexican American Political Association of Roseville. So I got an early history, Chicano history, of being involved in protests and of just knowing what was going on.

And then from there, my brothers at the time were at Sierra College. They transferred to UC Davis in the early seventies, and then again we saw Cesar Chavez on the campus of UC Davis, and then I learned that going to school is important. My parents, they stressed that we should go to school, especially college. They were a good example. They got their GED, learned English in adult school, so that was very good. So my early memories of the Movimiento is being like nine, ten, or eleven, and following adults protesting, and also not just in Placer County, but also in Yolo County at UC Davis. So I remember those times.

Then ten years later, I actually attended the University of California, Davis and started getting involved in other organizations, Chicano organizations.

Rasul And during that time, of course, the Civil Rights Movement was happening also. Do you recall any knowledge or any understanding of the Civil Rights Movement?

[00:14:00]

Aguilera Well I know that Chicanos were struggling. Especially there were many Chicanos that went to the Vietnam War. They had the Chicano Walkouts, they had the Chicano Moratorium in the late sixties, and I

think that was a very important issue that a lot of young adults, especially Chicanos, that were either going into Vietnam War or getting deferments—my two brothers Adam and Toddy, who also attended UC Davis, they were lucky enough to get deferments to go to college.

I just remember those times as a young activist, I could say [laughs], and just wanting to be more involved in my community. At that time, Roseville was growing. They probably at that time, you know, they went from like 6,000 in the fifties and sixties, to the seventies and eighties probably 20,000, and so there was more Latinos that we coming toward California. So at that time I knew that I want to be some type of leader through my adult young age and possibly into my adulthood.

Rasul Do you recall—what was it? Some people in Roseville, people call it "the bomb." What was it?

[00:15:10]

Aguilera Yes, that happened in 1971, and I remember the day before—

Rasul 1971?

Aguilera Yeah. They just had, I think, the anniversary. So my dad was at work at the time and many others Latinos were at work, and when it hit, which was about five miles out of Roseville, I was asleep. It happened at about 8:10, 8:40 in the morning. And I remember the night before, I was playing Little League and I struck out like three or four times in the game.

[laughter] And I said , “Oh no! The world’s over because I struck out and I’m not doing very good.”

But then I woke up, you could definitely see that it was something that people had to be evacuated. Our family had to be evacuated because we lived so close to the tracks. And my dad came home safe, but a lot of Latinos, especially some that are still living and they would be in their eighties, their late eighties now, some of them, their hearing took a loss and some of them just weren’t really the same. So, yeah, that was a very dangerous situation for many railroad workers and people that lived in the vicinity, especially within a five-mile radius, which was part of Roseville near the Roseville Auction and a little bit toward Antelope, Citrus Heights area. So, yes, that was a very big deal that happened, and we just celebrated—I think it was the fiftieth anniversary.

Rasul Wow. During our conversation, you’ve used Latino, Chicano, Mexican American. How do you think during that time, ‘65 to ‘80, that the term *Chicano* was accepted?

[00:16:40]

Aguilera Well, I know growing up and being in public school, especially at Roseville High School, a lot of Latinos that were active, they wanted to start their own organization, and a lot of the school districts, they didn’t have like a MEChA, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán or a Latino organization. So, to me, the term *Chicano*, C-h-i-c-a-n-o, is something

that is self—it's like self-named. It's something that you want to put a label on yourself. I know it was a term that probably wasn't used by too many people that were not Latino, because they didn't know what to call us. They just knew that we were a growing population. Sometimes, at least, I think, during the eighties, they we were invisible [laughs], but we're not invisible anymore. But back then, I think the term *Chicano* meant that you were, like, very political, you were like a rebel, but it was a self-named term, and I had no problems with it, and I learned from my brothers that they didn't mind being called Chicano. I think it's a term that over the years has changed, but back in the sixties, it was used a lot. In some respects, I think it might have not been a term of endearment, but I think if you say that you're a Chicano, it's something that's in your heart.

Rasul How do you think maybe the elders responded to the term *Chicano* during that time?

[00:18:15]

Aguilera Well my dad, he was a *mexicano*. He was born in Mexico, so I don't think he probably liked the term. But there might have been other elders that might have accepted it. But back then, my dad was like a zoot-suiter in some respects [laughs], because when he'd go out at night, especially in the Sunday night dances, he'd wear a nice suit, a nice tie. Maybe what he was called back then he didn't like, but, basically, I think some of our elders might have accepted it, but to this day, I think it's a controversial term. But as

long as you know where your heart is, and if someone wants to call themselves Chicano, they can. Chicano can also be someone that's not Latina, too, it's just in their heart, it's just a name. Then I think the big term that you see in the newspaper is *Latino*.

Rasul Your involvement in the Movimiento Chicano, did it change you personally?

[00:19:23]

Aguilera I think in some respects it did, because when I saw that there were injustices that were happening, and I mentioned when I was growing up there really wasn't too much racism toward me, but I witnessed racism toward other people. In Roseville, there weren't too many firemen that spoke Spanish or police officers that spoke Spanish, but yet there were citizens and residents of Roseville that needed help and services. So when I looked at those few that had positions of power, I thought to myself, "Well, maybe I can become a public official and help my race, help Latinos to hire more people in these types of services."

So I think I looked at the Chicano Movement as someone that like I, myself, would be someone that would be involved in working with the system, and I think that's why I ran for office and actually decided to give my life mainly as public service. To this day, I've been thirteen years on the local school board. So I think in growing up, I saw that there were things that I witnessed, but not personally, but that I witnessed of someone else that said

we really need to change things and hire more Latinos in certain positions so that we could get a better stake at jobs and salaries and just a better quality of life.

Rasul What role do you believe that the Latinas, Chicanas played in the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:21:04]

Aguilera Well I think they played a key role. Not only did they have many Latinas like, let's say in the Royal Chicana Air Force that were involved in the arts, but also there were Latinas that were involved in media, there were Latinas that were involved in other aspects of the Chicano Movement. So I think they played a key role. Like in the United Farm Workers back then, Dolores Huerta was right there with Cesar Chavez. During the Vietnam War, a lot of Latinas worked in helping serve our veterans. So I think it's a very important role that they played, and also I think it's something that we need to recognize more in the Chicano Movement, that there were more Latinas that were involved and able to give great answers to ideas that were happening regarding the Chicano Movement.

Rasul Can you name any Chicanas by name and specifically what they did?

[00:22:05]

Aguilera Well, the one that comes to mind is Dolores Huerta.

Rasul I mean here locally, I mean.

[00:22:11]

Aguilera Oh, excuse me. Let me think. Because I was a little young, I know my sister, who was involved in the Latina Movement, being a local student, she would tell me of meetings that would be happening of Latinas getting together, but specifically I think just because I was probably ten or eleven or twelve during that early movement, I don't specifically have any answers for you.

Rasul What did you help personally initiate or help initiate in this Movimiento Chicano?

[00:22:45]

Aguilera Well, when I was at UC Davis, I was involved in the MEChA organization, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, and I was very involved also in other organizations. I helped with campaigns, like on the campaigns of Phil Serna when he was running first for office, so I learned a little bit about politics.

Also, in the eighties I helped be a cameraperson, so I was, like, in the media and I saw that as a public service because there was a lot of stories out there that weren't being reported. So back then, it was called the Spanish International Network. So in the early eighties, I picked up a videocamera and I started doing reporting for the local TV stations and I was doing politics, I was covering the UFW, I was covering other issues, you know, Chicanos that had just been in the Assembly or the Senate, and they were all exclusive, so I

think I played a part in the media of doing stories and bringing news to people that would not otherwise be able to be at a story and then I would give information about the story as well. And then just in politics in general, I think in the future someday I thought I'd run when I was old enough, and I did run, and locally right now I'm on the local high school board.

Rasul You mentioned earlier that you did start the Youth Conference, Cesar Chavez Youth Conference.

[00:24:29]

Aguilera Yes.

Rasul Can you elaborate on that a little bit, what the conference does and all that, because I know it's very important to you.

[00:24:35]

Aguilera Oh, sure. Oh, yes. Back in 2001, Richard Polanco wrote a bill, I think it was SB594, that was regarding the Cesar Chavez Day of Service and Learning. And as a state employee—and my brother who you interviewed worked for the state like forty-two years, I think, as well. [laughs] We said, "Wow! Why are the state workers getting the day off? Why isn't the farmworker getting the day off?" And so I thought about it and I said, "Well, part of this bill of the state workers getting the day off is to do eight hours in the community." So I said, "Well, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to do a local conference in honor of Cesar Chavez and we're going to invite students so they can learn about college and career readiness."

So this was back in 2001, and we're now in our sixteenth year. The conference started in Roseville at a middle school and moved to Sierra College, which is a community college in Rocklin, and now it's going to be in its fourth year and in the total of sixteen years, but it'll be its fourth year at UC Davis. And last year we had 2,000 students come. We had students from all over Sacramento coming, Sac City Unified, Yolo County, you name it, Sutter.

The conference itself features many, many workshops, community workshops. We do free *chorizo con huevo*, *pan dulce*, *carnitas* for the students, we feed them lunch and dinner, and we have lots of entertainment, Aztec dancers, Ballet Folklorico, you name it, and we bring in speakers, keynote speakers. One year we had Dolores Huerta, we've had Jose Hernandez, the local astronaut, and then last year we had Francisco Rodriguez, who's the new chancellor of the Los Angeles Community College. who's from Woodland.

So it's been a great conference. I'm not the only one that puts it on. It's a whole array of community people that come together, and with the help of UC Davis, we're able to bring in about 2,000 students. It's generally around Cesar Chavez's birthday, so next year's conference will be April 9th, 2016 at the Pavilion at UC Davis. It's something that is a love affair, I guess, because I just enjoy the fact that we can just bring in new students or students that have never actually been to college and they can learn about the process of A-

through-G requirements and going to either a community college, CSU, or a UC.

Rasul The next question is obvious from your previous answers, but I'll let you elaborate on it. Did the Movimiento Chicano raise your consciousness along social, cultural, political lines? Please describe. [00:27:23]

Aguilera Yes, I think it did. From the early point of me running for student body president in middle school, then student body president in high school, I saw that there weren't too many Latinos running for office, at least in Placer County. It might be in all fifty-eight counties. And I understand that through a new report that there are actually only twenty-seven Latino elected officials in fifty-eight of our counties. So that means there's some counties that don't have any elected officials. So I think it changed me by knowing that whenever I would go, as early as high school, to a meeting representing Roseville High School or, as a city, representing the City of Roseville, I was like one of the only Latinos in the room and I said, "Wow! This is kind of unique. There's not people that are there that look like me."

So I think the Chicano Movement helped me decide to run for public office. So I did run for public office, and I ran for an elementary school board. I did that for ten years, and in that we were able to hire more minority teachers, more minority principals, and to this day in the Roseville City School District we have a Latino superintendent. So that was ten years on the

school district, and I think just one Latino as an elected official can really help make movement.

So now I'm on the high school board, I'm in my first term, and we made some great progress in hiring more minorities as well. So in all of Placer County, there's only actually two Latino elected officials, myself and a Chicano named Jack Duran; he's a supervisor in Placer County. So just one person is needed to make change, and I think the Chicano Movement in my past and knowing that we need more representation, especially in the political fields, I've asked many others to run in other counties and throughout the state, and something I think we need to have more Latino representation.

Rasul Your involvement, I know it takes many hours. How has this impacted your personal relations with you family members, with your peers, or your significant others?

[00:29:41]

Aguilera Well, my brothers, they've been my role models. I mean, they graduated from UC Davis, they were involved in organizations, especially civil rights organizations. My two sisters, they've always helped me. One thing that they've helped me with is during the Youth Conference we've have to cook like 4,000 burritos to give to the students [laughs], so they're always with me. I think we have one of the closest families, and I think, like I said, it was from my parents who said, "Give back." So I think that's always something that was instilled in us by our parents.

Then when I worked for the state, I worked for twenty years for Caltrans, I worked in the civil rights field. I actually worked in the Civil Rights Office, and that was nice because I was able to help with contracts that were going to disabled veterans, they were going to minority and women-owned businesses. So I've always tried to find jobs that would be in the civil rights field and so, luckily, partly what I do in the community, as well as jobs that I've done, so that way it'd be nice to still give back.

Any state service—and I would say that the Aguilera family probably has over 100 years of state service [laughs]—they've all been as public servants for the taxpayers. We get paid by the taxpayers. Anything we do out in the community regarding the Cesar Chavez Youth Conference or my brother's CAFE de California, those are all volunteer situations or volunteer positions. So I think there's probably not a lot of families or not a lot of people that have that *ganas* to help people, but I think it's important because of our background of being poor and being helped ourselves when we came to Roseville. Usually Hispanic families reach out to churches, so we were helped, as a poor family, by the Methodist Church, by the Catholic Church, by the Mormon Church.

My mom, like I told you, she used to clean houses and she was able to know who the *ricos* were in the family, so when it came to my dad saving money and buying houses, he had some good connections through my mom and through him to be able to buy some houses in the sixties, which at

that time they were pretty cheap. So you can imagine what they're worth now. So we're very lucky that through my parents and through my brothers, who—I told you I'm the baby in the family—I've had good role models, and I think in the jobs that I've attained, I've been lucky enough to work in the civil rights area.

Rasul You just answered the next question which was how has your involvement impacted your career, which I think you've pretty much said that.

[00:32:38]

Aguilera Yes, early on as a state worker, I took jobs that were in the Civil Rights Division, so that helped me a lot. And then as an elected official for the last thirteen years, that's a job where you're doing public policy, and in public policy, we want to make sure that we change the civil rights of helping our minority students, helping out English-language learners, making sure that if there's a minority student that goes into a classroom, that they actually mirror someone that looks like them. When I was at Roseville High School, I really didn't have too many minority teachers. So if you have a chance to hire a vice principal that's African American or Latino or Asian, I'm that one vote that can help change the personnel.

So I enjoy my job right now being a high school board trustee because there's a lot of responsibility in making sure that our students and our parents are happy and able to know that the schools that they're in, that

they're trusted, that they're safe. I was elected by my community, I got close to 30,000 votes in my last election, so some people are saying, "Oh, Rene, are you going to run for city council? Are you going to run for assembly?" But I really enjoy what I'm doing, I've done it for the past thirteen years, and I enjoy helping out and bringing students together for the Cesar Chavez Youth Conference. So I like what I'm doing right now. Of course, being fifty-four, I'm on the other side of the twilight of my career, I could say, but I'm very happy with everything I've done in the Chicano Movement and with spending time with the new youths that are coming.

We just finished with the thirty-second year of the Chicano/Latino Youth Leadership Project, which my brother Toddy was on the board of directors and I helped with that at that time with Roberto Gracia [phonetic] and Maria Chidis [phonetic] and Melinda Melendrez [phonetic] and Bill Chavez. We now have the up-and-coming youth that are coming through this conference, that have graduated from this conference. And so it's good that we're working with our youth, so that way once we settle down into our retirements, that the new youth will be able to be California's future leaders.

Rasul We've had many successes over the years with the Chicano Movement. What do you think are issues that are left unresolved at this point? [00:35:15]

Aguilera I mean, we're in the year 2015. Next year we will be a presidential race 2016. And if you look at what Chicanos, what their most

important issues are, it's economics. It's the hiring of jobs, making sure that we get a good wage, fifteen dollars, eighteen dollars an hour. So I think if you see what is on the mind of up-and-coming Latinos and Latinos that have been here through the movement, it's, more or less, jobs and economy, getting better in the economy, helping to give jobs to more Latinos.

Then after that, it'd be education. Those are, like, one of the top two or three. And the education would be that—my dad would tell me that no one can take your education away from you. You don't want to be a statistic and not be allowed or not be able to at least get a chance to go to college. So education is very important, so there's unresolved issues there. We need to look at the local school districts that are not helping out some of our English-language learners, and some of our students that are Latino descent that are possibly struggling in the classroom and getting them help, intervention help.

The third thing is immigration reform. That's a key issue. We have eleven million undocumented workers that are in this United States, mainly in California, that we need to make sure that they come through and get their paperwork so they're not taken away from their families.

So those are the three issues—immigration reform, education, and job disparity—that we need to work on. So those are unresolved issues. There's Chicano leaders that someday could be in positions that could help us at the top level. I don't think we've ever had a Chicano governor, but maybe there's someone out there that can do that job. I know the California

Superintendent of Schools would be a great position for a Latina or a Latino, and that's because right now there is twelve million students that are in public schools and about 54 percent are Latino. So that position is going to be up, I think, in 2020 or 2018. So if we can get more Latinos in higher positions, that, I think, will resolve some of our Chicano Movement issues. But the three issues I see are immigration reform, education, and job disparity.

Rasul With all these activities and successes, these *fiestas*, the celebrations, the conferences, how do you think that impacted the life here for the average Mexicano in the community?

[00:38:06]

Aguilera Well, I think those types of events, conferences, especially education conferences, cultural events, they bring people together. That's one of the things that myself, Rene Aguilera, is are known for, is for bringing people together, sometimes people that don't agree on things, but when you can have a job, education, art, and an event where you'll have all different types of vendors, education, people together, then you'll see that people that come together that can get information. So I think that's one of the things that I like to do, is I like to raise money for free events.

All of my events that I do in Roseville, whether they're Cinco de Mayo events or Dieciseis de Septiembre, the Cesar Chavez Conference, they're all free and I always make sure it's a job, education, art fair to make sure that there's all different walks of life that we have out there and that

people can meet each other. So I think those are important, and if there's anything free, then people will come out, especially families, because some Latino families, they have different types of families and their sons or daughters that may need help. I remember one time I was doing a Dieciseis de Septiembre event, I was on the stage and I was looking out and seeing a sea of people and I was going, "Wow! This is just great to see these people come together to meet each other and find out the resources that we need so we can move forward."

Rasul Time has passed, and many of our activists that were powerful and impacted our community, some have passed away. Can you recall anyone person or a couple of people that has passed away that contributed to the Chicano Movement here in Sacramento?

[00:40:05]

Aguilera Well yes, some of the RCAF members that have recently died, Ron Cervantes from Roseville, "Louie the Foot" that had recently died were very involved in Chicano Movement in the art area. Rudy Cuellar, Sr., who was from Roseville as well, he started the first Latino newspaper in Placer County that was very involved. I told you he started the Mexican American Political Association.

There was a Latino named Charlie Martinez in Roseville and he died in a car crash like in the seventies. He was going to be one of the first Latino city council members. He was very involved. He was a director with

the Placer County Fair. Gilbert Duran, by the way, was the first Latino city council member and that was about fifty years ago, so that's why I'm hoping to someday be on the city council to represent my city. But, yes, we've had some fallen warriors, so I'm excited about this project that you're able to capture hopefully 100 leaders from this area.

Rasul What do you see as current or future challenges for the Chicano community? You've mentioned some, but—

[00:41:21]

Aguilera Yes, I think just off the top of the head because I'm in education, education is definitely a challenge, especially in the community college level. We have students that are graduating that are eighteen and they either have to work or go to community college or both, and I think it's important that the Master Plan gets passed by the assembly. It's been over fifty years. Back then, it was mainly Caucasian students going to college, and now in 2015, I'm afraid that the assembly and the senate don't want to pass a Master Plan because they're going to say 10 or 20 percent have to go to college, and that 10 or 20 percent, because there's more Latinos entering college than non-Caucasians, that I'm afraid that they don't want to pass the Master Plan because they know we need to get more Latinos in those colleges. We need more slots opening. That's why I'm definitely in favor of UC Merced getting their extra buildings that have 4,000 more students and having more medical schools, because we need more professional Latinos. So I think

education is number one, and I know a lot of the first-time generation parents of young kids, they know that education is the way to get out of poverty. So I think that's one of our number-one issues, is education.

Rasul I just went to UC Merced to see one of my students graduate from there, and 80 percent of the names they mentioned were Chicano/Latino names.

[00:42:59]

Aguilera Yes, there's a movement called the HSI, which is the Hispanic Serving Institutions, and definitely UC Merced is one. UC Davis is closer at 19 percent. UC Riverside is one. So when you're talking to get 25 percent, such as Sac State, of Latino graduates more than federal monies come in to keep these students enrolled and able to graduate. And as you know, any starting salary of a state employee is about 42,000. If you have a B.A., you can get a job. So that's one of the great things of people like myself and my brother Adam and Toddy retiring from state service. We need to pull up more Latinos that have B.A.'s so they can start working for the state and also become public servants and get good salaries and be able to buy a home and start a family.

Rasul So do you see yourself continuing with your efforts in the community?

[00:44:01]

Aguilera Most definitely. I'm in my fifties and I have a lot of students that I talk to. They give me energy. Just talking to the students at the Chicano Youth Leadership Project, you know we're in good hands. But as we get older, we need to pass the baton, so to speak. So I probably have a good ten years more, but I also have other Latino students that can easily take my place, and that's what makes me happy because there's other leaders that are behind me, and other leaders that have better skills and abilities. So I think we're in good hands with the Latinos that we have that are up-and-coming leaders. But I also enjoy bringing people together, like I said, and doing free events, so I hate to charge anyone anything. [laughs] So I'll do my best to keep on raising monies to bring different vendors and students and parents together so they can get the resources they need.

Rasul Well, this concludes our interview, but I want to thank you personally for your individual efforts for our community, our *raza*, and also your family's efforts. *Gracias*. Thank you.

Aguilera Thank you so much.

[End of interview]