

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

Arturo Alemán

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Adriana Fernandez
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Transcription by Kimberly Chacón and Technitype Transcripts

Fernandez Good morning. How are you?

[00:00:03]

Alemán Good morning. I'm fine. How about you?

Fernandez I'm good. Okay, so what's your name?

[00:00:08]

Alemán Arturo Alemán.

Fernandez Okay. And your birthdate?

[00:00:14]

Alemán Gosh, a long time ago; June 28, 1949.

Fernandez That's not that long.

[00:00:22]

Alemán It's old enough to be your parents' parent.

Fernandez Oh.

[00:00:28]

Alemán I can be your grandpa.

Fernandez And are you married?

[00:00:31]

Alemán Yes.

Fernandez How many children do you have?

[00:00:34]

Alemán I have four.

Fernandez What's their name?

[00:00:36]

Alemán Xochiquetzal [phonetic], [two names], and Olin Nezahualcoyotl
[phonetic].

Fernandez Those are very beautiful names.

[00:00:47]

Alemán They're very Aztec.

Fernandez Yes. And how old are they?

[00:00:52]

Alemán My oldest is forty-two and my youngest is thirty-three.

Fernandez They're a good age right now.

[00:01:00]

Alemán Yeah. Like I said, my oldest could be your mom or dad. [laughter]

Fernandez And where were you born?

[00:01:06]

Alemán I was born in San Diego.

Fernandez And were you raised there?

[00:01:10]

Alemán I was raised in San Diego until I was eleven, and then I moved to San Luis Obispo. Do you know where that is?

Fernandez Yes.

[00:01:18]

Alemán That's on the central coast.

Fernandez I went to college there.

[00:01:21]

Alemán You did?

Fernandez Yeah. And where are your parents from?

[00:01:26]

Alemán My mother was born in Whittier, California, and her parents were in California also. And then my father was an orphan of the revolution and he came to the United States by himself when he was seven years old. He was born in El Rosario, Sinaloa. He went across the Sea of Cortez on a ferry and then walked with a group of other people from La Paz to Tijuana and crossed there when he was younger.

Fernandez And what do your parents do for a living?

[00:02:04]

Alemán They reside with God. They passed away in 1994 and '96.

Fernandez And how many brothers and sisters do you have?

[00:02:17]

Alemán I have six brothers and sisters, two brothers and four sisters, and I'm in the middle. I'm number five of the seven.

Fernandez And what are their names?

[00:02:28]

Alemán Anna Aurelia, Amelia Abigail, Apollos Asención, Alberto Amos, myself, Aurora Areli, and Aida Alejandra, all of them Alemán. Well, not anymore.

The girls are now—

Fernandez And what do they do now?

[00:02:51]

Alemán My oldest sister works in the court in Santa Maria, California. She's an interpreter and also a community organizer. My next sister lives here in Sacramento and she's got a bunch of grandchildren. She's retired. She used to be a farmer. She actually had her own strawberry farm and had worked herself and her kids and her husband almost to death, and then they just retired and barely can—so they're surviving.

Fernandez That's good. And can you please describe your experiences as a child and youth?

[00:03:37]

Alemán Well let's start in San Diego. I was raised about two miles from the Mexican border. In fact, when I was a kid, we used to walk to Tijuana and there was no fence, there was no nothing. We would just walk over. I remember my very earliest memories of that was my dad used to take us on weekends and we'd go get a

nickel haircut [laughter] and then go have some *caguama* and other—he had a favorite restaurant where he used to go.

I was raised in the country. There weren't any housing developments there at the time. It was in an area that was really impoverished. In fact, it has a real derogatory name, so I'm going to tell you the name, but don't get offended. It was called Nigger Hill.

Fernandez Oh, okay.

[00:04:36]

Alemán We were the only Mexican family that lived there. We were surrounded by pig farms and other stuff where people worked. On the other hand, my grandmother, whose family had been in San Diego forever, they had built a adobe house there about the time of the missionaries, and they lived about a quarter of a mile from the ocean in Solano Beach, Del Mar, La Jolla, which is now very ritzy. So I split my time between that environment, which was pretty upscale, and then the other side, which was really poor, and it was interesting.

When I was eleven, my dad got a job at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo as a janitor, and we went from San Diego to San Luis Obispo, where I went to elementary school, junior high school, high school, junior college, and eventually went to college there.

Fernandez And how was that transition from San Diego to San Luis Obispo?

[00:05:52]

Alemán It was really difficult at first. San Luis Obispo at the time had *very*, very few Latinos in it. It also happened to be the richest high school in the state at the time, so I was also very fortunate, and it speaks a lot to what the education and situation is and why it's important that we fully fund and provide programs to schools. We had a planetarium and we had our own telescope at the high school, and we had a full biology lab. We had a fully stocked library that was much like this right here. I mean, it was a very nice library.

So I grew up in a very rich community, but, again, I was the only Latino. I mean, my brother and two other guys and then there were four girls that went to school with us also, so there was pretty much the eight of us in the high school that had in our grade graduating. My graduating class, we had maybe four hundred kids, and there was only eight Latinos. Interestingly enough, all eight of us moved on, went to college. One of my schoolmates, Latino, Jesse Magnia became a principal in Brawley. Louie Garcia is a regional supervisor for PG&E. Let's see. Who else? Oh, John Rodriguez, he became a schoolteacher at Santa Maria High School. And then myself, and I came to Sacramento 1976.

Fernandez Now we're going to switch onto a different topic. Were you a Fellow, Felito, or were you actively involved in the Mexican American Education Project?
[00:07:52]

Alemán No. However, I was very involved in Latino activism. I was a member of MEChA in college. Prior to that, in San Luis Obispo I was involved in creating and managing the Unión Cívica Cultural Mexicana. My roots are Native American, so I

lived on a reservation for a very short period of time, and so I have kind of—if I had three feet, I'd have one foot in three different communities. One's a Native American community—I'm still very active in that—the other one is Latino community, and the other one is, of course, we live in a larger community, and I have my foot in that also.

So I was a member of MEChA. MEChA, in fact, I was at UC Santa Barbara when MEChA was created. However, I wasn't a Mechista, so I wasn't even involved in what they did. I just happened by happenstance to be at the college at the time.

I came back to San Luis Obispo after about six months at UC; I didn't make it. I came back to San Luis Obispo and then went to junior college there. Then I got drafted and went to Vietnam, and when I came back, I went into Cal Poly, which was automatic. I went to Cal Poly and did very well. Of course, I was much older by then. In the two years I spent in the military, I actually grew about ten or twelve years in maturity, so the military was a very important factor in my growth as an individual.

Then after I graduated from Cal Poly, I was looking for work. I didn't want to go to L.A. and I didn't want to go to Bakersfield or Fresno or San Francisco, so that only left me San Diego and Sacramento. So I started looking for work in both places. I happened to have some friends here, and they helped me find a job with the state of California, so I went to work for the state of California.

Fernandez Were you aware of the Mexican American Education Project and its mission?

[00:10:25]

Alemán Uh-huh, very much so. I was active with that. In fact—jeez, I can't remember who was the executive director at the time. But I also worked with and had a lot to do with *consilio*. When I first arrived to Sacramento, my job was to be a recruiter for the California Department of Parks and Recreation, and my job was to go out and find people to work for the park system. And so the only way to do that is to go out in the community, and that's what I did. I did that for a couple of years—oh, about eighteen months.

Kept getting promotions, and I got promoted to work with the resources agency which is a parent organization to the Department of Parks and Recreation. So I made a big leap, and then from there I went to state and consumer agency and got another promotion. I've worked with the state of California and about thirteen different departments, boards, commissions. Eventually I was appointed by Governor Brown the first time around and then I was appointed by Governor Gray Davis to sit on the California Integrated Waste Management Board.

Fernandez That's great. And did your knowledge of cultural issues influence your involvement and participation in the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:11:59]

Alemán Oh, yes. In fact, I was very involved all the way back, even before I went to college. My parents were the first ones to have the Equal Opportunity Commission in their—and we had it in our living room. In our community, my parents helped start it. So I was involved in the Chicano Movement *really* early on. I was involved with MAPA. I don't know if you know what MAPA is. It's the

Mexican American Political Association. And then when I was in college, we created—I was involved with MEChA and we created image which was the—jeez, that was so long ago. Image. It had to do with government employees, Mexican American government employees. Usually that group worked with the federal government employees, for the most part.

When I came to Sacramento, then I was involved in CAFE de California. I don't know if you know what CAFE de California is, but it was a state employees organization started much like MEChA. In fact, many of the people that started CAFE within the larger institution of the state, which had 280,000 employees at the time, the people that started CAFE de California, most of those were Mechistas. So MEChA goes a long ways in my history and in my development as an individual.

Fernandez And what are your earliest memories of events that attracted you to the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:13:42]

Alemán When I was about fifteen years old, I went with one of the founders of MAPA, the Mexican American Political Association, to a meeting in Fresno. That was in 1966. We went to a meeting in Fresno and I sat at a table with all these guys that were a lot older than I was. I was a kid and they were people that were in their fifties. They were talking about what the Mexican community needed to do to advance itself, to move forward, and the discussion was, well, you can't have any movement forward unless you're involved in the political process. So I was involved

in that. That's my earliest memory. And I got excited about it, and so I've never really left it, and to this day I'm still doing it.

Fernandez And how did other Mexican, Mexican Americans, Latinos react to the term *Chicano* and *Movimiento Chicano*?

[00:14:47]

Alemán Well, that's really interesting you should say that. My wife and I still talk about it, because she was involved also in the Movement. At the very beginning, there was a negative reaction to the word *Chicano*. "We're Mexicans. You know, we're not Chicanos. What's this Chicano stuff?" But as the guys kept coming back from Vietnam and the *Movimiento* was really starting to pick up speed and things were happening and there was a lot of activity, folks in L.A. were really moving, and all over the state, actually all over the country. But things were starting to happen, and the Vietnam veterans were really starting to be a lot more militant about what was going on. Then people started to accept it. So it was a gradual thing, but, I mean, it just took on a life of its own. So it's kind of like being called—folks used to call Negro and then they changed to Black and later on to African-American. You know, now we call ourselves Hispanics. Well, I still call myself Chicano, but that's basically—it's an evolution of thought of how people think. So, yeah, it was really an evolution.

But *Chicano* came about with people like Armando Rendon, who was talking about it, writing about it, Rudy Acuña, a professor at Northridge. They all wrote books, and these books were starting to be passed around between the Chicano

community and people were picking up on it. They were the real *inteligencia* of our community way back. Then people like Herman Sillas was involved in defending the Brown Berets that were involved in the blowouts in L.A. Then the word *Chicano* then started to take a lot more meaning, and it was a form of new identity. We were starting to create identity for ourselves in those days, and it's really moved forward quite a bit.

Fernandez Had you heard of the Civil Rights Movement at that time?

[00:17:09]

Alemán Yeah, I was involved in it, obviously, with the discussions of MAPA when I was fifteen, sixteen years old, and so, yes, I was very much involved and interested. I think it was because we were kind of rabble-rousers, you know? It was something to do. I mean, it was easy to catch on. When you're young, you have a lot of idealism and it's good to express that idealism in positive ways and move it forward. And of course, we thought we were doing positive things the whole time we were doing stuff, even with regard to the blowouts. I mean, to express yourself in the civic arena, even sometimes when it becomes violent, it can result in positive things happening. The best example I can think of right now is what's going on today in Baltimore. Those folks are expressing themselves in their frustration of being unable to move forward. Their community is stagnant. They don't have any outlets for expression, so they express themselves in violence.

But on the other hand, now the establishment is forced to answer that. They're saying, "We've got to do something about this. This can't just let it sit." So even

though Baltimore's run by Black leaders, they still face the problems of suppression in their own community. Poverty does that. You know, when you're poor, you don't have a way out. The only way out when you're poor is education, and when they don't even have that, then things can get pretty ugly.

That was what was happening back in the sixties and seventies. We were well aware of the farmworkers and the Farm Worker Movement. We were aware of Cesar Chavez and what he was doing. I got a chance to meet him several times and many of his other friends that were working in the Movement for the farmworkers. But they weren't the only ones. Things were happening in unions. The Laborers' International Union of North America right now is about 85 percent Latino, and it's one of the largest, strongest unions there are. The Teamsters were being confronted by Latinos, and the same thing was happening there. We were pushing the envelope, pushing against them, because that's what we needed to do. We needed to get them to let go of that.

I will tell you, really, quite frankly, I came from a meeting yesterday and it was an interesting meeting. It had to do with 209 SCA 5. Are you aware of SCA 5? State Constitutional Amendment 5 was a law that was proposed by Senator Ed Hernandez to eliminate the effects, the bad effects of proposition 209, which is limiting the opportunity of Latinos to get into universities.

Well, there are specific groups that were opposed to it, and they came out and they actually were very actively successful in stopping that bill. But I met last night with the leaders of that group, and it wasn't like in-your-face confrontational, but it

wasn't a "I love you" kumbaya kind of meeting either. [laughs] It was like, "You know, you're hurting us. We're not going to let you hurt us. And you may not be hurting me, but you're hurting my kids, you're hurting my grandkids, you're hurting our future. So, no, we're not going to let you do that."

So we're now talking about what the next steps are, and the next steps are to have that bill come back on and eliminate it. I mean, we're, what, 45 percent or 42 percent of the population of California. We should be 42 percent of the students at UC Davis and all the other universities. We should be 42 percent of all the leadership at corporations. But again, power is never conferred. Nobody gives it to you, nobody says "Here, *toma ahi esta es tuyo*" except your parents, you know. But people don't give up stuff, so you have to say, "Hey, look. You know what? That actually belongs to me and you're holding onto it and I want it back." And so you have to tell them that, and if you don't, if you don't have the *ganas* and the interest and the fire to tell people, you're going to be standing with your *sombrero* and *tapando todo el tiempo*. I mean, you know what I mean? And that's why we call people *tapados*. [laughter]

So you have to fight for what's yours. It's not *ever* going to be given to you. Nobody ever gives it to you, except that you do have people, individuals that will open the door and you have to take full advantage of that opportunity when it's given to you. But many times it comes at the cost of other people's interest and what they're doing. If you look at it like a picture that was drawn by Diego Rivera—I don't know if you've ever seen that. It's a mural and it shows a *piñata* and there's a little kid breaking the *piñata*, and he's just like, "Okay," and the candy's all on the ground, and

there's a little *gordito*, he's trying to get it all and people are kicking him. And another kid's grabbing candy and another one's crying in the corner, "I didn't get any!" you know, the *chillones*. Well, that's what it's like. Somebody's always got to break that *piñata*, and it might be you. It might be you who's breaking the *piñata*. And somebody's always going to gather the candy from that, you know, the goods. So you have to really think about how you're going to move your community forward and how you're going to break that *piñata*, and there's a lot of *piñatas* to be broken.

Right now I'm working with UC Davis to bring 300 students to UC Davis in the STEM program so that they can matriculate into UC Davis. In fact, I just spoke with the chancellor about that. I'm working with Adela de la Torre to see about bringing Chicano kids into UC Davis. They have a desire to create a Hispanic-serving institution out of UC Davis. It's not only out of altruism; it's that they're going to get a lot more money if they do, so that's good. I mean, every time things are happening for the good, you've got to take it. Whether they have good intentions about it or not, it's good.

Cesar Chavez used to say, "Hey, I eat grapes. They're already picked." If somebody gave me a box of grapes. I'd eat them. There's nothing wrong with that. It's already been picked. Somebody's already paid the price for it. But when it comes to getting people to give a good price for it, to pay the workers what they deserve, it takes work. The farmers aren't going to say, "Oh, yeah, you know what? You deserve twenty dollars an hour for the work that you're doing. Don't worry about it. It's not going to break me if you get twenty dollars an hour." *Hell* no. They want to pay two

dollars an hour if they can, and they always will. I mean, that's just pure economics. So you have to be willing and able to fight for what belongs to you.

Fernandez And did your involvement in the Movimiento Chicano change your personality?

[00:25:44]

Alemán No, I've always been a *peleonero*. [laughs] I've always been happy to pick up a battle. That's just, I guess, who I am. But there's all kinds of us and we all work together on it. So, no, it hasn't really changed my personality, I don't think. I'm not paranoid about things. I just know how things work and I work it.

Fernandez And how about personally?

[00:26:14]

Alemán Personally?

Fernandez Mm-hmm.

[00:26:15]

Alemán Actually, I will tell you. I worked for the state for thirty-seven years and I retired with a *real* good pension, so I have nothing to complain about. I have generally good health, and if you have anything at the end of your career, as you start going downhill in your life, you want to have good health. That's more important than anything else. I had a five-way bypass eight months ago, but it's all good. I survived. [laughs] And there's a lot of people that have them at our age, by the way, I don't know if you know that. It's a good thing to happen.

Fernandez You had mentioned that your wife was pretty active within the Movement as well. So what do you think the role that Chicanas played within the Movement?

[00:27:05]

Alemán About 60 percent.

Fernandez Sixty percent?

[00:27:12]

Alemán Yeah. [laughs]

Fernandez What were they doing within the Movement, these Chicanas?

[00:27:15]

Alemán Oh gosh, they are the ones that *do*. If you ever want anything to get done, you don't ask the guys. You ask the women. [laughs] And it's just not tamales that they're making. I mean, my wife has a master's degree and she at one time was the negotiator for the state with the unions, so in her own right, she's done her own and, in fact, she deserves to be here also. You know what I mean? This is not something about me. We've worked as a team since we've been together and we've worked to move things forward. So, yes, Chicanas are probably more important than the guys when it comes to the Movimiento.

Fernandez As in like they organized it, they put things together? Is that—

[00:28:01]

Alemán Yes, they're *very*, very organized. Women, I think, can multitask better than guys, and so they get a lot more done. I have three daughters and they're

all adults and have their own children now, and they're still the core of the family. It's women who pass on culture, it's women who pass on language. You learn to speak from your mother, not your father. I mean, your mother spent her time teaching you. Your dad, you know, well, whatever. But you learn everything you're going to learn that's really important in life usually in the first five years of your life. Your personality is formed, your interests, for the most part, are formed. They're developed later in life, but they're mostly formed when you're little. And for the most part, they're formed by your mother. So, yeah, that's how it works.

Fernandez What did you personally initiate or help initiate in this Chicano Movement?

[00:29:12]

Alemán I've been involved in founding, I don't know, four or five Latino organizations, three or four Native American organizations. I was involved in the founding of CAFE. I'm one of the charter members of CAFE. I was a charter member of United Latinos, of which I'm working on right now. I would like to invite you all and anybody who's out there who hears this to join United Latinos, because what we're doing is we are trying to affect what our impact is with regard to the community in Sacramento. We've been involved in getting Eric Guerra elected to the city council, the first person in twenty years. We were actively involved in the selection of Jose Banda, who's now the superintendent for the Sacramento Unified School District. We're involved in bringing UC Davis to the community rather than just some pie-in-the-sky ivory tower out there. We're now bringing them in and

getting them involved. I was involved in MEChA when it first started and Unión Cívica Cultural Mexicana, and Latino STEM, most recently. I was just involved on—actually the cofounder of Latino STEM, which is an organization dedicated to bringing STEM to the Latino community.

I was involved in Hispanic Recreation and Leisure Services Association, which is an organization involved in ensuring that Latinos have access to recreational activities, because it's so important in health, for everybody's health, to be involved in recreation and leisure services. So I was involved in that. That later morphed into another national organization called the National Hispanic Energy and Environmental Council, which is operating out of Washington, D.C. And let's see. Involved with many, many organizations as a member and working with them, but the ones I mentioned are the ones that I was actually on the founding board of directors.

Fernandez And this happened once you had moved to Sacramento? Is this where it all, like, initiated for you?

[00:32:01]

Alemán No, actually, as I said before, when Unión Cívica Cultural Mexicana started in Arroyo Grande, it was a reaction to a blowout that they had at the high school. When I first came back from Vietnam, I was working in the fields. I mean, I came back and I couldn't find a job, and so I went to work at my sister's farm and I was picking strawberries.

What happened is, is that at the local high school in Arroyo Grande there was a real problem between the Latino kids—this is a high school that's about fifteen

miles away from San Luis Obispo, so it's a different high school than I went to. But it had about 75 percent of the students were Latinos and most of those were farmworker kids. And the farm owner kids were coming to school with rifle racks and, you know, they had rifles in their cars. A couple of fights started. The next thing you know, it was starting to get pretty ugly.

So what the sheriffs decided to do was they surrounded the school and they let all the White kids out, and then the Mexican kids, they were beating them up and taking them in. So we had a community meeting. Actually, it was my sister who said, "Well, my brother's the only one who has any college. He should be our spokesperson."

So they elected me to be the spokesperson, and I suggested that everybody just keep their kids out of school, the whole community just keep everybody home where it's safe. It turns out it was the best thing I could have done because schools operate on average daily attendance, which, if you keep 75 percent of the school kids out, that's a lot of money. If you keep them out for two weeks, that's *huge* money. So after two weeks, they were kind of begging us to come back.

That's when I met Herman Sillas. Herman Sillas was a real activist in Los Angeles. He was also in the U.S Commission on Civil Rights. I called him up and asked him to come in, and he came in along with his coworker Charlie Ericson. They came in and they said that I was doing the right thing, sit down and meet with them and figure out what we're going to do. But he actually helped guide me on how to ask for the right things.

So we did that, and the school then made some concessions to us. We wanted counselors, we wanted no weapons at school at all, so farmer kids had to keep their guns at home, you know, a bunch of other things. We ended up with a community liaison. That organization of course, grew until it was no longer necessary, and now the school district went through a real dynamic change and now has gone all the way back. This is a really interesting dynamic, because once you take power, holding onto it is just as hard as going after it. [laughs] So the people in the community kind of just laxed off, and next thing you know, first one counselor was gone and then another counselor was gone, and before you know it, we're back to where we were thirty-five years ago, which I think to a great extent is where we're starting to be, even now, even—I mean, just because you're 75 percent of the community like we were in in Arroyo Grande doesn't mean you have the political strength and the power that you're supposed to have. So they've relinquished it. They gave it back. And now they're actually becoming more active. They actually called me not recently and asked me to come down and meet with them. They've created another new organization, LOC, Latino Outreach Council. They're in the process of developing that and they want help with that.

Fernandez Can you explain of other ways like the other organizations you were involved with had a significant impact on the Chicano Movement?

[00:36:26]

Alemán Well, I only do it if they do. They have to have a positive outcome. I've not been very involved with the American GI Forum or the League of United

Latino—LULAC. I forget what their acronym means. Not because of anything, but I think over time, you get old people and they start to slow down and the young people don't come in and take over, so the organizations tend to kind of—so the important thing is to have a good balance of young people and middle-aged people and then the older folks who have the experience and bring them together and work an organization.

Fernandez Did the Movimiento Chicano raise your consciousness along social lines?

[00:37:18]

Alemán Yes, it's basically around socioeconomic lines. One of the things that we did many years ago is we were really involved in something called the crab theory. What it means is, is that when you have a whole bunch of crabs in a bucket, you don't have to put a lid on it because the other crabs will just keep pulling them down. Well, we have to break that, and we have been, but it's a slow process. So the consciousness of doing that also includes not being jealous of people who succeed and allowing them to succeed and letting them move forward. We need billionaires in our community, we really do. We need millionaires and we need the rest of us. Together as a community, we can do that. Right now, Latinos comprise about \$1 trillion of the economy nationally, which would mean that if California was all Latinos, that's what our state economy is. It's a little bit over a trillion dollars. So if we live that way, if we allowed ourselves to become the leaders that we are and actually took charge, then we could all operate in a social way and economic growth.

Fernandez How did being involved in the Chicano Movement have an impact on your relationship, on your family and your peers, significant others?

[00:38:57]

Alemán Well, for all my peers, you have to ask David Rasul and see how they feel about it. But my family paid a price. I spent a lot of time away from home when I could have spent it with them. My wife is very supportive. She's always let me—she said, “Hey, you know.”

And I'd say, “I'm going to a conference and I'll be gone. I'll be back in five days.”

She'd say, “Okay, see you in five days.”

Of course, every once in a while, she'd say, “I'm going to the Latina Conference” and I'd say “Okay.” [laughs] It's a little bit tougher when you have to let your spouse go. But, you know, that's just the way it is when you have an equal relationship, and that's what you have to do.

Fernandez Can you please describe some of the impacts that your involvement with the Chicano Movement had on your career? I know you mentioned it maybe a little bit.

[00:39:51]

Alemán Actually, I'll tell you the truth. I always put MEChA on my résumé, and it stopped me from a lot of jobs through the years, especially during the time of Pete Wilson when he was the governor, because you'll remember my entire career was working for the state. During the time that Pete Wilson was in, I was Blacklisted.

There were only eighteen people on the Blacklist that Pete Wilson had, and my name was one of them. I found this out from Jim Nielsen, who happens to be a state senator now. At the time, he was in charge of the Prison Parole Program and he was also in charge of the Prisoner Transfer Program, and I applied with him to get the job to be responsible for transferring prisoners between countries like Mexico, Guatemala, China, or whatever, and he came back and said he couldn't give it to me and he's the one that told me.

So I went on and worked for the Department of Justice under the governor and Board of Equalization, which is not under the governor. So I'd work in different organizations that were not controlled by the governor.

Fernandez And looking back on your involvement, do you feel like any issues were left unresolved?

[00:41:21]

Alemán Yeah, actually there's a lot of them, and I'm working on them. One of them, and the most important one, is education. I was just in a conversation with the governor and Janet Napolitano with regard to having more money transferred from the General Fund into the UC system, and the only thing I chimed in to say, which was a long conversation, was take the money from the prisons. Close prisons down and open universities. And, of course, you know, everybody has different feelings about that, but that was my only opportunity to chime in. [laughs] That's what I did.

Fernandez How did the Movimiento Chicano impact community life here in Sac when you moved or back when you were living in San Luis Obispo?

[00:42:13]

Alemán What's that?

Fernandez How did the Chicano Movement impact the community life here in Sacramento or back when you were living in San Luis Obispo?

[00:42:20]

Alemán Well, there was a lot of unity, and there has been. In fact, this past May 3rd at Southside Park, I don't know if you guys went to the event that they had there. But back in the seventies, we used to do that regularly, I mean all the time, and there was a lot of more close-knit community for us. At least I perceived it to be that way. But in those days, there was a lot less Latinos in Sacramento. There's about a half a million Latinos in the Sacramento region. That's a lot. I mean, you can't possibly communicate with all of them all of the time. Some speak Spanish, some not at all, some are wealthy and some are not.

I'm working right now with another group called the Inter Youth Soccer League. It's a group of about a thousand families and they're providing soccer opportunities for Latino kids that are from pretty poor families. Many of them are the children of micro entrepreneurs, the guys that decide they want to buy a lawn mower and a blower, and they go out and work for themselves and they're making a living for themselves and their family. They're always on the margin. I mean, they don't have a lot of money. If they're lucky, they learn how to do the system, work it better, and they develop a business and make it bigger, hire a couple more guys. But in reality, they're known as micro entrepreneurs.

Fernandez Many Chicano activists have passed on. Can you identify an individual or individuals that you feel had an impact on the Chicano Movement?

[00:44:13]

Alemán Jeez, the first one that comes to my mind is Mario Obledo because he had such an impact at the state level, with state employees, and at the national level also. But I've known a lot of them. All my old friends are starting to pass away.

Mario Obledo, *este* Rafael Guerrero.

Fernandez What were their roles within the Movement?

[00:44:44]

Alemán Mario Obledo was an activist. He came from Texas, was hired by Jerry Brown during his first administration. Mario Obledo made a *huge* change in state service. At that time, Latinos were about 7 percent of the total workforce of the state. Out of 180,000 employees, about 15,000 were Latinos. Mario Obledo came in, he was the agency secretary, which is a cabinet level right next to the governor, and he just forced the departments that were under him to hire more Latinos. And then he'd hire other Latinos, such as Esteban Esteban Ibarra. Esteban then forced the departments that were under him to hire more people. So we just brought in people like crazy. That was a good time because we were able to make a lot of hires.

So, Mario Obledo, he's passed on, and *este* Ed Roy Ball, who's in Los Angeles, I knew him pretty well. Of course Cesar Chavez. In those days when I knew these guys, though, they were starting—you know, they weren't big, big names on a

national, international basis. They were like you are, you know, and like we are, just young and working it and hard at work and doing crazy things.

Let's see who else who's passed away? Jeez, there's so many of our guys that have passed, and women too. Many of them I can't recall right now. Jeez, I wish I could. I'm going to go home now and write down all the names of all these people.
[laughs]

Fernandez What do you see as a career or future challenges for the Chicano community?

[00:46:53]

Alemán Interestingly enough, your greatest challenge is to learn to compete effectively on a worldwide basis. I mean, we're now living in a global situation. Everything you do now is global competition, and if you think that other groups, ethnic and racial groups, are not thinking in that sense, you're sadly mistaken. The people I was talking with are from another racial group, and their main thing was, "Well, your kids aren't getting into universities because they cannot compete effectively." Well, then what does that tell you? Learn to compete, right? [laughs]
And so you're in a competition.

There are only 2,500 slots at UC Davis for entering students every year. There are about 45,000 applicants. Okay, so you're competing. You're competing with at least eight other people, and so you have to work hard, because guess what? I mean, everybody knows. I mean, it's no big secret. To give you an example, there is the belief that Asians, their parents and they work 24/7 to get in and they're really super

smart. Well, that's a myth, but people believe it and people operate off myths. But that doesn't mean you can't let up. You have to prepare yourself really hard, but it's not impossible, because there's people working to get you in. There's people like David Rasul and there's people like Adela de la Torre, who's a vice chancellor at UC Davis, and there's Alex Gonzalez, who just retired from Sac State, but he's brought in a lot of people. There are people working hard to give you an opportunity.

Your part of the deal is to work hard to meet that need, because people are working hard *for* you, but they can't *do* it for you. You really have to work hard. And I'm not saying you're not; I'm just saying. But don't be afraid to work. For me, it was either that or go back to the fields, so I worked hard at school. [laughs] It was a lot easier than picking strawberries. But those are the challenges that you have. The largest challenge is to know that you're in a competition for your education and that your education will automatically translate to freedom. That is what you have to know.

The other thing that's really important is, is that while the economy of the United States is stagnant, the economy of Mexico is running at about 7 percent, so there's a lot of communication between what's going on on a business level, between what's going on with Mexico and California. In fact, Mexico is the largest trading partner with California. California happens to be the seventh largest economy in the world. You have automatic access, especially if you speak Spanish. I mean, you look Mexican. I don't know if you're Mexican, you could be El Salvadorian or whatever, but the reality is you look Mexican. So you're in! All you have to do is use it

effectively, prepare yourself and use it effectively. And that's what I tell people, the young people. So that's where it's at right now. That's what the challenge is, that you have to compete effectively and use the resources at hand, learn what they are and use those effectively. It's like you don't want to go play soccer in tennis shoes. You want to have shoes that have cleats on them, right? That's basically the same thing.

Fernandez Do you see yourself staying as involved as you are?

[00:51:25]

Alemán Until I die. Somebody's going to have to knock me off. [laughs] I can't seem to escape it, and every time I try and get out, I get pulled back in. It's like that scene in *The Godfather*. [laughter]

Fernandez Well, thank you so much for this interview.

[00:51:49]

Alemán Are we done?

Fernandez Yes.

[00:51:51]

Alemán Good, because I've got to take my wife to the doctor.

[End of interview]