

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education  
Oral History Project

**Armando Botello**

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Austin Beckwith  
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Transcription by Manminder Shergill and Technitype Transcripts

**Beckwith** Can you please state your full name?

[00:00:09]

**Botello** Sure. My name is Armando Enrique Botello.

**Beckwith** And when were you born?

[00:00:14]

**Botello** August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1951.

**Beckwith** And, Armando, do you have any family? Are you married?

[00:00:20]

**Botello** Yes, I am married. My wife's name is Leticia, we've been married for thirty-five years and we have a son and a daughter, Armando and Araceli.

**Beckwith** Great.

[00:00:32]

**Botello** And two grandkids. [laughs]

**Beckwith** Wow. Congratulations. Could you please describe your early life?

Where were you born and raised?

[00:00:42]

**Botello** I was born in El Paso, Texas. However, I didn't live in El Paso more than maybe the first two days of my life. My family was from Juarez, so back in the fifties, the term "anchor baby" wasn't used, but, basically, think if I would have been born in the 2000s, I would've been called an anchor baby. But my family lived in Juarez. That's where I grew up.

**Beckwith** Can you please elaborate on where Juarez is?

[00:01:12]

**Botello** Yes, Juarez is in the state of Chihuahua, and it's a border town that turns into El Paso. You just cross a bridge over the river and then you're in El Paso, Texas, so, yeah, very close to each other.

**Beckwith** And what did your parents do for a living when you were younger?

[00:01:32]

**Botello** My father was a business owner, he owned bars and restaurants, not several at a time, but one at a time. He would buy one, sell it, and then he would buy another one. So, yeah, over the course of the years that I spent in Juarez, he owned probably a good five or six. And my mother, she would work in El Paso. She was a waitress in El Paso for several years.

**Beckwith** And growing up, did you have any siblings, brothers and sisters?

[00:02:05]

**Botello** No, I'm an only child.

**Beckwith** Do you have any experiences that you remember best during your childhood with friends, family, or in your neighborhood or community?

[00:02:18]

**Botello** Experiences?

**Beckwith** Yeah.

[00:02:22]

**Botello** Such as? Just growing up?

**Beckwith** Yeah.

[00:02:28]

**Botello** Well, I lived in Juarez until I was fourteen, and it was very interesting living in Juarez, because it was a border town, it wasn't really Mexico-Mexico, but it wasn't really the United States either, so the people from the border towns are almost from birth until we're grown, we are acculturated. We know about both cultures. A lot of us start learning English, even if it's just a few words, because all of our media. Back then, we used to get from El Paso most of the radio. We would listen to the TV that we would watch, it was all in English, but at the same time, we were living in a Spanish-speaking world, so it was very interesting and I think it prepared me quite a way to live in the United States. So when I came to the United States, even though I was of full Mexican-educated because I went to school in Mexico, I was very familiar with the United States.

**Beckwith** Good. Thank you. Growing up, did you study any cultural anthropology, and what was your knowledge of any of the cultural issues or influences with the Chicano Movement?

[00:03:52]

**Botello** Well, to begin with, as far as history is concerned, I learned Mexican history in Mexico, so when I came over at fourteen years old, I was already very

knowledgeable about Mexican history, anthropology, etc., but then there was a period of time while I went to junior high and high school that I really didn't take classes such as that. But when I got into Sac State, then I started taking a lot of Chicano Studies classes. In fact, one of my two majors is in Ethnic Studies. So, yeah, I was very aware of the culture and of the anthropology and the history of not only Mexico, but then the Chicano Movement as well.

**Beckwith**      What year did you start studying here at Sac State?

[00:04:39]

**Botello**        At Sac State? Well, we came here in the sixties. My first year in Sac State was 1970.

**Beckwith**      And could you explain how the perspective of your earlier, I guess, studies on the Chicano Movement has influenced your understanding or has encouraged you to participate in the Chicano Movement?

[00:05:06]

**Botello**        Well, my first knowledge of Chicano Movement and Chicanismo was probably in my last year or two in high school. I went to Sacramento High School, and Sacramento High School had problems dealing with race issues in those years. There was a couple of riots or near-riots in the school, mostly dealing with Black students that were very unhappy, but then eventually the Chicano, the Mexicans also joined in, and there was quite a few problems. So there was kind of my first knowledge or my first when I came face-to-face with the Chicano Movement.

And then also my last year in high school, a group of us joined some of the local leaders and we went to the Chicano Moratorium in L.A. when there was a riot

and when there was a killing of a newspaperman [Ruban Salazar]. And I think that had a big influence in me.

So at the same time I was growing up in that high school, I was already looking forward to going to college, but I didn't think I had the grades, but eventually I was able to be admitted through a special program with EOP. I didn't get any economic help, but I was able to at least come into Sac State, to be admitted. Once I was admitted, as I said, I took several classes and I was involved in a lot of different issues, but most of all, I started finding that media was always attracting me. I became involved in the student radio station that Sac State used to have. Sac State used to have a radio station. The call letters were KERS, and it was all student-operated. Everybody who was on the air, everybody who was a producer, the managers, etc., were all students, except for we had a faculty advisor, but it was basically a student-run station.

I became involved in a bilingual program that was called *La Voz de Aztlán* that had been started the year before I was there, and I think that my involvement in that program basically forged my future of getting involved in communications and in media, because that's where I learned that that's what I really wanted to do.

**Beckwith** Good. So you mentioned that high school was kind of your first, I guess, experience with the Chicano Movement. Would you say that was like the very first time you've ever heard of the Chicano Movement, or had you known of it before then?

[00:08:00]

**Botello** No, that was pretty much the first time, because that was around 1968 or so, when it was kind of beginning, so yeah, that was my introduction, I guess.

**Beckwith** And with your involvement in the Chicano Movement, going to L.A. to participate in these Movements, did it change you personally, I guess change how you looked at, I guess, culture here in the United States or, I guess, California?

[00:08:38]

**Botello** I don't think that really changed me right there. I think it made me a little more aware, but I think I had already been, because I had acquired some knowledge about it by the time I went to that. Even previously to that, I was involved with a group of students who would go to other parts of the state, to Delano to take food for the farmworkers, for the United Farm Workers. We would have food drives here in Sacramento, and then we would drive them down to Delano. I was aware of the problems, all the different problems with the farmworkers, and maybe more of a rural type of environment. I was aware of what Cesar Chavez was doing. I had a chance to listen to him speak at some of those rallies that they would hold when we took the food, etc. So, yeah, I think the moratorium maybe was part of it, but it wasn't just like the turning point. It was part of a process.

**Beckwith** And participating in these movements, also could you recognize any important women who were in the Chicano Movement, and what roles did they play?

[00:10:07]

**Botello** Well, yes, definitely. I mean, there was a lot of women, starting with Dolores Huerta. Dolores Huerta was an icon even back then, as far as women is concerned, but even some other women, local women who were supporting the

efforts, they were very, very prominent in some of the things that we were trying to do, not only that I was trying to do, but it was a community effort. So, yeah, there was a lot of women representation.

**Beckwith** And during these Movements, did you personally initiate or help initiate any Chicano Movements?

[00:10:50]

**Botello** Well, I don't really know if it was Chicano or *mexicano*, because back then, there was, like, a big difference, and I think it still is, but the program that I was involved in, the radio program that I was involved with at Sac State, I didn't initiate it, but I was part of a group of students who actually made it grow. When I first started working in that program or volunteered for the program, it was a four-hour program on Sunday mornings, and a couple of years later after me and a few other students from Sac State and some from Sac City and from other—we started recruiting a lot of young people to get involved with the program and to be on the air or to help us in different ways. And then we started asking the station for more and more and more hours, and the station saw that there was a big need and saw that we had a big audience, because the phones were always ringing, so they started giving us more and more hours.

In three or four years, we had probably close to sixty hours a week of programming, and basically we kind of took over half of the radio station, and it was really nice because a lot of those students grew up later on to get jobs in media and become either reporters or camerapeople or whatever, but a lot of those people were

initiating their careers, or at least finding out what they liked to do and what they wanted to do with themselves, so I think that was a big part of it.

And then later on, as part of my career also when I started working, one of the first programs, one of the first things that I started doing was I started volunteering. Back in the sixties and in the seventies, the FCC used to require the local TV stations to provide local time for organizations and for community service programs, and one program that was already on the air, I didn't start that program either, but it was called *Progreso*, and it was aired on Channel 13 for a half-hour every Sunday, so I started volunteering for that program and it was also done.

One thing I forgot to mention about *La Voz de Aztlán*, the radio program, was that it was done bilingual, so we would do half of it in English and then we would either repeat it in Spanish or try to try to make it understandable to both people who spoke English and who spoke Spanish also. That's the way that *Progreso* was done also at the time, and I started volunteering. I used to do five minutes of sports on Sunday mornings. The program was pre-taped, so the sports news that I was reading were always like a week old, but that was basically the only information that was really being done bilingually here in Sacramento.

Eventually, when I graduated from Sac State, they hired me to work for the program, and I worked for that program for probably a good twenty years, and during that time we also provided training and we also provided the program—it was an outlet for people who wanted to get into media. In this case, we mostly provided opportunities for people who wanted to be reporters or camerapeople, and there are



several examples of people who went on to become professional newscasters or photographers.

**Beckwith** Good. Could you restate the name of the radio program?

[00:14:36]

**Botello** *La Voz de Aztlán*. It means *The Voice of Aztlán*.

**Beckwith** And your involvement with the radio, or I guess with also the the TV program, would you say that your consciousness with the social and cultural, political lines changed during the time?

[00:15:06]

**Botello** Definitely. I believe that during that time, yeah, there was so many things happening at one point at one time, and we were covering. The beauty of it was that we were right in the middle of everything and we were able to cover it for viewers or for listeners, and we were able to talk to people who were very involved in this Movement or people who were very influential, professors, politicians, artists, etc. So I think that definitely it had a big impact in my way of thinking and in my way of presenting the program and in my own development.

**Beckwith** And would you say that your involvement in these programs also helped your relationships with other peers or significant others during this Movement?

[00:16:04]

**Botello** Yes. I think that what was happening when I first started, there was like a division between Spanish media. Spanish media was also growing at the beginning and it was at the beginning stages of Spanish broadcasting media, but

Spanish media wasn't really accepting the Chicano Movement or the Chicano issues or the Chicano events, and I think that because of programs like *Progreso* and like *La Voz*, we were able to kind of fuse them together and to start attracting the Spanish media to those events, to cover those events, and to work together. I think that that was a big part, and I think that I was partially responsible for that.

After a while, I started working for a commercial Spanish radio station, and I was able to convince that station to start moving more towards covering the events that were happening, for example, at Southside Park, events that were being held more in a Chicano environment, and I think that started attracting Mexican people and Chicano people in kind of celebrating together and holding these things together, because before that, it was a big division. It wasn't one thing. It was more like two different cultures for a while.

**Beckwith** Good. In the radio stations and TV stations that you worked with, would you say there was any kind of prejudice towards Chicanos or were they pretty willing and accepting for you guys to get on the air, get on TV to have your voices heard?

[00:18:14]

**Botello** The radio stations, I don't think so, but on the TV stations, and, of course, I don't want to say that everybody, but yeah, there were people who were very—I guess they didn't see it as a good thing to give us this air time or to provide coverage of certain things or certain issues, etc. But I think throughout the years, since I was there such a long time, I think that eventually some of those people kind of came around and started seeing it a different way. Instead of being confrontational,

I think just by being there constantly and providing good information, I think some of those people that were even against it at the beginning were becoming more aware of the need and a little bit more supportive. I'm talking, like I said, a few people in the station, but the station itself was usually very supportive, and even though the management at the station came and went, they were changing managers all throughout those years, a lot of people came and went because that's basically how media is, overall, most of the managers, the people who run the stations, were very supportive.

**Beckwith** Good.

[00:19:47]

**Botello** Overall, okay? [laughter]

**Beckwith** And would you say that your early involvement with the radio station at Sac State and starting *La Voz*, was that what kind of sparked your, I guess, excitement/interest in pursuing public media?

[00:20:09]

**Botello** It did, but it was more of a reawakening, okay, because something that I didn't tell you before, when I was about maybe ten or eleven years old and I was still living in Mexico, in Juarez, through my grandmother and through my father, they got me a summer job in the newspaper there in Juarez. Juarez back then had like four daily newspapers, but the company where I got that summer job was responsible for three of those dailies, and what I did during that summer, basically I was sweeping floors and cleaning up and working in the print shop of the paper, because it was the old style of doing the newspapers. So I would be sweeping a lot of metal, because that

was kind of a residual of how they were printing the paper. But I became of what takes place to put a newspaper together and what the role of the reporter was and what the role of the editor was and what the role of the printers were, and the artists, the graphic artists, etc. So I think that that's kind of what really, really started in my mind my love for journalism.

At the same time, right around that time, maybe a year or two later, my extended family was involved in a radio station there in Juarez also, so I also started going to the radio station and becoming aware. This was old-time radio. A lot of programs were done live, and a lot of the commercials were being done, some of them were being done live, some of them were being recorded. So I kind of started learning a little bit about radio. I'm telling you, I was like eleven or twelve years old.

But all of that kind of stopped when I came to the United States, because I didn't have access to those things. But then again, it was kind of restarted when I started going to Sac State in the seventies.

**Beckwith** Going back to the Chicano Movements that you were involved with, looking back in the Movements that you participated in, were there any issues left unresolved?

[00:22:32]

**Botello** Probably a lot. I mean, there wasn't always agreement on a lot of things. There was a lot of discussion and infighting. I mean, obviously everybody was different. I mean, everybody had their own thoughts. So, yeah, I think there were quite a few. I mean, I don't remember the exact issues, but even with the program itself, with the TV program, with *Progreso*, the people who wanted us to take the

program really, really far along the way of, you know, the messages that they wanted us to give would be kind of far out, and some of our board were kind of conservative, so we had to kind of be kind of in the middle and take the program along the way that it was more of what we wanted, what the audience wanted and what the audience needed, not what the forces behind it wanted us to go. But, yeah, I mean, issue, I don't really recall, but, yeah, there were several things that I remember there was a lot of disagreement.

Even in organizations like, for example, the Sacramento Concilio was a group of different organizations that united to provide services, social services to the community and also they were responsible for the production of *Progreso*. And even within that body, there was always a lot of disagreement. So, yeah, it wasn't always like everybody following along. I mean, it's a democracy, so everybody had different ways of thinking.

**Beckwith** Good. Can you describe how the Chicano Movement impacted the community here in Sacramento, whether it was some of the rallies you attended or maybe through the radio station or TV stations?

[00:24:46]

**Botello** Probably the biggest impact that it had here locally and everywhere, probably, it's the education. We became more conscious of the need for education and educational programs and also the political awareness. I think those are the fruits of the Chicano Movement at the beginning that we started providing. There was a lot of education programs. For example, Sacramento City College had an extension right in the middle of the *barrio* on C Street that was attended by I don't know how many

people came out of that place, to come to the college itself, and it also served for people who started, to get them started in the idea of attending college, and then eventually they made it to City College or maybe Sac State. So that was one of the many, many programs that were started, but, unfortunately, they didn't last very long.

**Beckwith** You mentioned you attended one of Cesar Chavez's speeches. Were there any major political—or not political, but Chicano activists that had a lasting impression on you?

[00:26:13]

**Botello** Well, I think he was the one. To me, he was the one that had my most admiration. Locally, Joe Serna was also the one that caught my attention, especially because he was one of the students and I knew him even from before I started going to Sac State, so I have a lot of respect for him, had and have.

**Beckwith** What current or future challenges do you see for the Chicano community here in Sacramento or other places that you've been to here in California?

[00:27:01]

**Botello** I don't really see a Chicano Movement. I think a lot of people have become either more—even if they are politically aware, even if they are more politically involved now or in politics, I think they're either Democrat or Republican or whatever, but I don't really see anybody identifying at those levels as Chicano. They're Latinos or Hispanics or Mexicans, and I think that's okay. I mean, as long as they have some kind of conscience, I think that's what counts. It doesn't matter what you call yourself, but I think it's the ideology and the way of thinking that you have, where you're directing your efforts and your thoughts and anything that you do, and I

think there's a little bit of that Chicanismo in most of those people anyway. I kind of see it by their actions and by some of the legislation that they have been implementing or that they've been passing the last few years.

But you were asking me about challenges, right?

**Beckwith** Yeah, that's the second part. Do you see yourself staying involved in meeting these challenges that you believe that the Chicano community is going to face or is facing currently?

[00:28:44]

**Botello** I don't really think I'm as involved anymore. In fact, I haven't been involved, personally involved in many, many years. I mean, I was doing my thing through my reporting, through my writing, through my broadcasting, etc., but not really directly involved probably for a good twenty years or so.

**Beckwith** Back to some of the early memories of your Chicano Movement involvement, some of the Mexican Americans or Latinos, how did they react to the word *Chicano*?

[00:29:38]

**Botello** A lot of them were not accepting it. Even now, I mean, it's not accepted by some people. There's a huge difference. I wish I could take a poll and find out what's the percentage of people who accept the word and what's the percentage that doesn't accept the word. But, yeah, and back then even more. Speaking for myself, I know that *mexicanos*, Mexican people, who had just come across to the United States weren't really accepting of that term, but I think eventually it became more accepted, and I think it had a lot to do—it was kind of

funny, because I remember that some of the local groups started going to Mexico, to the University of Mexico, to present plays and to present conferences, etc., etc., and apparently in Mexico City it was more accepted than here in the United States by Mexican people. But then eventually I think, because it came from Mexico, then the people over here started being a little more open towards it, and also because they started seeing that it didn't only mean going on strike and going on demonstrations, etc., but it also meant programs, it also meant education, it also meant a lot of positive things that solved a lot of the problems that we were having back then.

**Beckwith**      Going back to kind of your early life in El Paso, would you say that the demographic there was mainly Mexican Americans versus then when you moved to Sacramento?

[00:31:37]

**Botello**      Well, I never really lived in El Paso, but, yeah, I'm very familiar. Yeah, it was probably a good 70, 80 percent Mexican in the fifties when I was living there, definitely.

**Beckwith**      And when you first came to Sacramento, were there a lot of prejudice issues against Chicanos?

[00:32:01]

**Botello**      I came to Sacramento in 1965, and we lived in a neighborhood that was pretty much—I mean, I don't want to say majority, but it was a high percentage of Mexican people, Mexican American, Chicanos, so I really didn't see it because we were so much within our own culture right then. I didn't start seeing it until later on, not right when I came, no, but maybe a little bit later on, a few years later, and I think



I started seeing it more when the Chicano Movement started taking over or started taking—because I think it kind of created a reaction to seeing the people marching, etc., etc., and I think that some people saw it as a confrontation, maybe, and I think that created a little more—or maybe it didn't create it, maybe it was already there. Maybe just kind of brought it out to life a little more, discrimination, etc.

**Beckwith** Great. Well, that about wraps up all the questions that I had, but were there any other issues or topics that you'd like to add?

[00:33:32]

**Botello** No, I don't think so. Anything you want to know? [laughs] No? Okay.

**Beckwith** Great. Thank you.

**Botello** Thank you.

**Senon Valadez:** Whatever's in your mind.

[00:33:50]

**Botello** Okay, something that has bothered me for a long time—can I say bad words? Because the story I'm going to tell, it entails a bad word.

**Senon Valadez:** Say whatever.

[00:34:04]

**Botello** Okay. [laughter] In Spanish. Okay. Yeah, sometimes when something happens, events that happened during the sixties, the seventies, etc., and a story is told, every time that somebody else tells it, it kind of adds a little bit. Something happened in the program of *Progreso* that it has been—now it's even on a video and a lot of people think that it was a fact, but, in fact, it was a poet, a local poet went to our program. Our program was open to a lot of artists and a lot of writers, etc., singers,

musicians, and one time we had a poet and he wanted to read a poem that just repeated the word *chingar*, which is, you know, a bad word in Spanish, a *very* bad word. And the people in the station didn't allow us to use that word. So they kindly told him that that word was not going to be used and that he couldn't read the poem.

Well, now the story has turned around, and the way they tell it now is that it created a big chaos and that the station management came down and that it turned into a big, big thing, and it wasn't like that at all. I mean, anybody would have told him at that time, and we're talking about the mid-seventies or so, that that word would not be used, and we're not talking about singling this person out, but we weren't discriminating or anything. It's just that that's the way the law was. I still think that you can't say that word in Spanish in Spanish media right now, even though it's very liberal.

So I just kind of want to set the record straight that that story did not happen the way it's been told.

[End of interview]