

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

Duane Campbell

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Karina Álvarez
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Transcription by Anai García and Technitype Transcripts

Álvarez Welcome.

[00:00:08]

Campbell Thank you.

Álvarez Please state your full name and your birthdate.

[00:00:12]

Campbell Duane Campbell, February 23rd, 1941.

Álvarez And your marital status?

[00:00:19]

Campbell Married.

Álvarez Do you have kids?

[00:00:19]

Campbell Yes, I have one son, Javier Sean [phonetic].

Álvarez So where were you born and raised?

[00:00:28]

Campbell I was born and raised in Waterloo, Iowa.

Álvarez Where did your parents live?

[00:00:34]

Campbell In Waterloo, Iowa.

Álvarez How many brothers and sisters do you have?

[00:00:40]

Campbell I had one brother; he died a long time ago.

Álvarez Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Please explain or describe your experience as a child around the youth and your family in your neighborhood.

[00:00:52]

Campbell Well, I grew up in a working-class neighborhood, mostly mixed Black and White. Had decent schooling and had a pretty good life.

Álvarez Were you a Fellow during the Mexican American Movement?

[00:01:13]

Campbell No.

Álvarez So what are your earliest memories of the events that interacted with the Movimiento?

[00:01:20]

Campbell Well, I came to the Mexican American Education Project not as a Fellow; I came recruited as a faculty member in 1969. So that was really my first interaction with the Chicano Movement. Before that, I'd worked with the Black Civil Rights Movement, but I came out here to take a job with the Mexican American Education Project to help the Fellows write curriculum for Mexican American

students. My doctorate was in writing curriculum for African American students, so they recruited me to come out. I figured the curriculum part would be the same. The cultural part would be very different.

Álvarez Did your involvement in the Movimiento change you personally?

[00:02:09]

Campbell Yes. In '72, I went to work for the United Farm Workers Union, and I worked with the UFW for four years all the time, and then part-time for three more years, so that changed a lot about my life, lots and lots of things.

Álvarez What role do you believe that Chicanas played in the Movimiento?

[00:02:38]

Campbell Chicanas? They had varied roles. They had some very important roles. You can see that in the life of Dolores Huerta, who fundamentally changed the nature of women's roles in farm labor. My wife is a Chicana activist and so she tells me a lot about the role of women in the Chicano Movement. So I think women had a very important role throughout. It changed over time, but a very, very significant role.

Álvarez What did you personally initiate or help initiate in the Movimiento?

[00:03:23]

Campbell Well, I and my wife ran the Sacramento boycott for the United Farm Workers Union for four years. I have here some letters from Cesar if you'd like to see them, and photos of me and Cesar working together. So for four years we picketed every week at local grocery stores, usually Safeway, sometimes others, but usually Safeway, and that required organizing and bringing people out.

And then because I was teaching at Sac State with the Mexican American Education Project, many of the students in there were engaged in our picketing and working with us, and so I got introduced and involved in lots of parts of the Movimiento, but my most direct involvement was with the United Farm Workers Union.

Álvarez What were some of the organizations you were involved in?

[00:04:21]

Campbell Organizations? Well, the United Farm Workers Union. I was involved with the Faculty Union at Sac State, and then I was on the Sacramento Central Labor Council. We did that to bring the UFW message to labor, because the UFW was a labor union, but a lot of labor people didn't know about the UFW. During that time, Joe Serna was the chairman of our Boycott Committee, and he was doing the political work, and I and others were doing the weekly picketing.

Other organizations? In '76, after we left UFW work, we helped organize here in Sacramento a thing called the Sacramento Immigration Committee. We did immigrant rights work from '76 to '86, till IRCA was passed, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. We opposed that, but we wanted to make it better, so we formed the Sacramento Immigration Committee, worked with a very famous person named Bert Corona on that. He was a leader in immigrant rights work.

Other organizations? Eventually, we formed the Latino Commission of the group I work with, Democratic Socialists of America. We had a Latino agenda within DSA. And then later, I and others were part of several key election campaigns, like

chair of the campaign to defeat Proposition 227, which was the proposition that banned bilingual education. I was on the steering committee, No on 187, which was the anti-immigrant proposition. So we had a series of organizations that did electoral work trying to defeat hostile and nasty propositions.

Álvarez How did these changes impact your personal relationships, whether it be family, your peers, or significant others?

[00:06:35]

Campbell Well, starting with the UFW and then going on, I shifted a lot of my work to be within the Chicano Movement. Then my wife and I got married; that affected my relationship. So then I had in-laws who were all Chicanos, *mexicanos*. I don't know. It taught me a lot of things. It taught me discipline. One of the things you learn with UFW is discipline; that is, to decide on a task and work toward it, and to keep working when everybody else gives up.

Met wonderful people, became friends with wonderful, wonderful people. Dolores Huerta is a friend of ours. I met Cesar several times, but he wasn't particularly a friend. Philip Veracruz, who was one of the Filipino farmworker leaders, he was a personal friend before he died. People often stayed at our house, and so I got to meet a lot of very wonderful people, became friends with them, Bert Corona and others, that became a new network of friends and allies that would work together on many, many, many, many projects.

Álvarez Do you still communicate with them now?

[00:07:57]

Campbell The ones who are still alive, yeah. Bert just died, Philip has died. I still see Dolores two or three times a year. That's always an adventure.

Álvarez Can you describe the Movimiento Chicano, how it impacted the community life here in Sacramento or even where you lived?

[00:08:19]

Campbell How it impacted the community? Well, you know, there was a traditional community here that was not aligned with the Movimiento Chicano all the time. As we did farmworker work, particularly boycott work, there were a lot of people who didn't like us there, including a lot of *mexicanos* who didn't want any part of farmworker solidarity, not a majority, but they were always there. I became a good friend of Father Keith Kenny, who was the priest down at Guadalupe, and he did a lot of work with the farmworkers, did a lot of support stuff with us.

So I would say there were divisions, no more than any other community, but there were divisions within the community and that changed over time mostly. Now everybody goes back and says what tremendous allies they were of the United Farm Workers Union. They always remember it in strange ways.

The other thing that happened was after the Mexican American Education Project, which lasted five years, we went on to create at Sac State a bilingual education program in the College of Education, and eventually I became the first chair of bilingual multicultural education. So through that, we graduated over 600 Chicano students to be teachers in this area, so we really changed the composition of the teaching force here. Sacramento was different than many of the other cities in

many ways. One of the ways was that if you go to the other CSUs, Cal State universities, and UCs, in most cases, Ethnic Studies was primarily Black Studies, but here the Chicanos had equal standing with African Americans, and that's because through the project originally, through the Mexican American Education Project, we were able to bring so many faculty and so many students here that we had the numbers that really made us an outstanding location for education and change and activism.

I don't think that's true anymore, since there's been a decline in the last ten years. Bilingual education at Sac State's been eliminated, so at least at the university level, we're no longer on the front edge of all of that. And then the Movement has changed so much, so it's hard to say what it is now. But certainly from '70 to '85 or '90, Chicano Studies at Sac State and Chicano activism, we were one of the leading areas in the country, did lots of things. I'm sure you've heard of José Montoya and Esteban Villa and all those people. Did things called Third World Writers Conferences, brought in outstanding people. There was a major cultural renaissance and support, and that's also the time when—well, you can see it again this year, that's when people started to put together Cinco de Mayo programs, which aren't going to happen this year. So you can see that wave of participation that occurred in the seventies and eighties.

Álvarez So what do you see as current or future challenges that the Chicano community will be facing?

[00:12:17]

Campbell Well, right now they have several tremendous challenges. I worked all these years training teachers, and in my view, things are getting worse, not better, for lots of reasons. So, amazingly, Chicanos now make up 50 percent of the students in California public schools, but we're training fewer Chicano teachers than we were ten years ago. So education is a major challenge. We're not making the progress that we should because I would say—I don't know if you know the work of—the guy's name is Lopez, *Dog Whistle Politics*. He's a Salvadoran writer for UC Berkeley. He says that when racism is attacked, it doesn't go away; it changes its form. And so I would say that we made tremendous progress in the seventies and the eighties, but the dominant society has adapted now, and so there are nicer ways to carry out a very negative agenda. Without getting in too much, we have a Hispanic president of Sac State, but we have fewer Chicano faculty than we had when we had Anglo presidents of Sac State. We could get more by pressuring Anglos than we can get by talking with Hispanics sometimes. Sorry, that's the way it is.

So, challenges. I would say education. One of the major changes that occurred after the Mexican American Project that I was fortunate to be a part of because of bilingual education, in bilingual education the vast majority of students are *mexicanos*, first generation, because that's who's bilingual. A lot of Chicanos don't speak Spanish. So there's been a huge change on the campus in terms of use of Spanish. It used to be you would rarely hear it spoken on campus, and now it's common. Twenty-four percent of the students at Sac State are now Latino or descendants of Latinos. So there's been this huge growth at the younger level, at the

student level, and then a passing of a generation at an older level, and there's a gap between those two generations.

There's also been tremendous cultural changes. I don't know if you would describe them as—I wouldn't describe them as part of the Chicano Movement, but you have a huge growth of Hispanic fraternities and sororities, so you have an integration into the existing system, rather than a demand for change. But those aren't all negative; it's just a change. I was amazed last year. I went to an event. One of my students invited me to an event, it was a Día de Los Muertos event, and here were all these Hispanic fraternities and sororities, but they got 800 people out to this event. I was looking at, well, you know, MEChA's getting out twelve people and these guys are getting out 800? So I wouldn't over-predict how those changes would occur. I mean, things are happening different now. The agenda that was so useful in the sixties is gone, it's changed, so we have to find a new agenda.

Álvarez Thank you.

[00:16:01]

Campbell That's it?

Álvarez Yeah.

[00:16:03]

Campbell Okay. I don't know which of these things you want. This is the founding convention of United Farm Workers Union; I was a delegate to that. There's a couple of letters here from Cesar Chavez if you want to copy them. If you don't

want them. that's okay. I'm not forcing these things on you. But here's letters from Cesar saying, "Thank you for your work," not to me, to the boycott community.

This is what we're doing now we're doing now. You can have that; that's a Mexican American Digital History Project. And the other thing I brought was, if you're interested, as I said, I chaired the campaign to try to defeat Proposition 227, the anti-bilingual ed campaign. These are documents from that if you want. You can copy.

You didn't ask me six because I wasn't in the project, but the early memories of the Chicano Movement, when we came out here, I came out here to work for the project, but the Mexican American Education Project at Sac State was the organizing center of the northern California effort to build the Chicano Moratorium in Los Angeles, the famous 1969 Moratorium. That was organized out of our offices for northern California, not Southern California.

Under organizations, there were a series of organizations connected to our efforts in bilingual education. There's California Association of Bilingual Education and Association of Mexican American Educators, and others. First there was the Chicano Movement, which came out of Chicano community. Then it grew this huge Bilingual Education Movement, which was connected to the Chicano community, but it didn't always come out of there. As I said, a lot of it was *mexicanos*, first-, second-generation *mexicanos*, but there were also a lot of Chicanos in there. So that really changed job opportunities for Chicanos, because they could become a bilingual teacher and they could get hired.

I mean, it would be good to find a way to measure how much impact we had here. I've done some counting and, as I said, we trained over 600 teachers. At least 500 of those are in this region, so 500 Chicano teachers in a region over time. Now, they're not all saints. Some of them just disappeared, but some of them went on to do really good work. It's always amazing to know the work they did, like ex-students of mine ran California Mini-Corps. I don't know if you know what Mini-Corps is. Mini-Corps is a program to train people to work in migrant education, so you recruited people into Mini-Corps, they worked in migrant education, and they went on to be teachers. It's a *huge* statewide project, recruited *hundreds* of people, hundreds of Chicanos into education.

Other ex-students of mine have just done wonderful things. Montoya was an ex-student of mine. But other ex-students of mine have done just wonderful things. A lot of them ended up teaching at Sac State, teaching at AR, teaching at Sac City. So that was really the impact, was seeing students that started in the project and went on to do more and more things, so that changed a lot.

Then there was a huge personnel changeover, because—well, that's all part of the project, but Steve left and went on to become a vice president at another campus. He was in the leadership of the CSU system for a while. So we had a significant impact over the time. Had some people who worked at the State Department of Education. It's hard to trace exactly where people did it, but it's amazing that you go into a meeting—I was in a fight last year, two years ago, over getting more Chicano history in the schools, and you go into a hearing and you're making testimony, and all

of a sudden you're seeing people who were your ex-students who are talking with you. So it's has had a real impact over the years. That's why it's so hard to quantify it, so that's why the project you guys are doing is good, is to get a description of the base, because if you don't know where this came from, you tend not to see all the connections that are out there, but there are just incredible connections out there.

After the Immigration Community, I and others, on the edge of the Movimiento Chicano, I and others did a lot of Central American solidarity work helping Salvadoran refugees, bringing Salvadoran refugees to Sacramento, bringing Nicaraguan refugees. So we did a lot of antiwar solidarity work with the Salvadoran, Nicaraguan communities. And then as I said, the Immigration Committee.

Impact my personal relationships? I already talked about that, gained lots of new friends, lots of new people I've worked with for years.

Thank God, life in Sacramento. Well, Sacramento was different in another way too. Sacramento the city and the county, I don't have the exact figures, but I think in the county now—let's see. In the county now there must be about 16, 18 percent Latino population. In the city, there's probably 25 or 30. What that meant was, I think, and this is not always agreed upon by everybody, what I think it meant was Sacramento was a city in which there were multiple racial and ethnic groups. There were African Americans, Chicanos, Latinos, Asians, and Whites, and they were roughly in equal numbers, which meant you had to cooperate, as opposed to cities such as, let's say, Oakland or other places where it was a battle between a Chicano

Movement and a White population. Here you almost always had to negotiate cooperation among several groups, which changed the nature of what happened here.

Also in terms of that question, consequences. Because we created bilingual education here and we created a lot of it and trained an awful lot of bilingual education teachers, we then became the bilingual education center for Chinese Americans and for Vietnamese Americans and for Hmong. So work that we did became used by others, which was fine. I mean, we meant to do that. But we became an assistant to other groups because we had gone and gotten the money and gotten the placements and gotten the hirings at the university.

Future challenges, how far in the future? I think I've done that one. So, thanks. Good luck on your work.

Álvarez Thank you very much.

[End of interview]