The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education Oral History Project

Rick Joseph Gonzales

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Elizabeth Vargas and Karina Pantaleón
April 27, 2015

Transcription by Technitype Transcripts

Q Can you please give us your full name?

[00:00:09]

Gonzales Yes, Rick Joseph Gonzales.

Q Can you give us your birthdate?

[00:00:15]

Gonzales Not really, but I will say August 20th, 1946.

Q Can you provide us with your marital status?

[00:00:25]

Gonzales Yes, I'm married and I have—let's see. I have four children and I have five grandchildren now. In fact, we're taking a vacation to Cancún, Mexico, June 12th, right after school gets out, and we're taking all of our grandchildren, all five of them. So we're going to Cancún for the second time. I haven't been there for a long, long time. I know it's changed, just like this place has changed. I graduated from Sac City College once upon a time, and it's very different now, including the library. [laughs]

Q Where were you born and raised?

[00:01:03]

Gonzales I was born in San Francisco, California, but I only stayed there a day, and my family took me to Elko, which is where my father had some dealings or whatever, but I was raised in Woodland. I graduated from high school, from Woodland High School, in 1964.

What's your next question?

Q What did your parents do for a living?

[00:01:30]

Gonzales My father was a barber, and my mother had a lot of odd jobs. She was mainly raising the four kids. I have three brothers, so there was four of us that grew up in Woodland. Then she became a cosmetologist, and then my father—well, they both went to cosmetology at the same time, and then they opened up a salon, a hair salon in Woodland. So that's what they did.

My father was very active in the community, so active that they named a park after him in Woodland, which is now destroyed. It was in the *barrio*, Donnelly Circle in Woodland, and it was really nice because when it was inaugurated, they had a nice statue on both sides of the street, because it's actually two soccer fields and then a street that goes between them, and then they had a play area. So the residents—or not the residents, the druggies of that *barrio*, they destroyed and burned down all the play area and they destroyed the two, so the only one that knows it's named after my pop is me, because I was there at the ceremony. That was the city.

Then the county named a county building after him, called the DESS Building, the Department of Social Services. It was renamed the Rick Gonzales, Sr.

Building, and the only reason I know that is because I was at that service too. And in Yolo County, most of the buildings are named after people who are deceased, and my father was the exception. He was still alive. In fact, that was his last thing that he did attend. He passed away at eighty-five years old, but he did attend his inauguration of his naming of the building. But again, the only thing he has is a little sign that as you go in the door, it says the "Rick Gonzales, Sr. Building". Otherwise, they called it the DESS Building. So whenever I'm in Woodland, I always correct everybody. They say, "Are you going to DESS?"

"No, that's not the DESS Building. That's the Rick Gonzales, Sr."

"Well, how do you know?"

"Because I attended the ceremony and it's named after my father."

But, anyway, he was very active in many, many organizations, Latino and everything else, and I'll talk about the Concilio, which he was one of the founders, as we continue.

Q Okay. So you said you had four brothers?

[00:03:56]

Gonzales Three other brothers besides myself. I was the third in the line.

Q And can you describe your experiences as a child and youth in your family and neighborhood?

[00:04:07]

Gonzales In Woodland. Let me start with saying when I graduated from high school, I made a commitment to myself that I would never live in Woodland. So I was not a very good student, average, played sports. Sports was my—I could hit the

ball harder than anybody else, I could throw the football harder, I could run faster, and so sports was my niche, you know.

I felt very isolated in Woodland because I was always singled out for something that I didn't know until I went to college to find out what it was, and I took a lot of being made fun of. "They left you in the oven too long," you know, the whole thing.

I'll never forget when I was a paper boy and I went to collect my money from someone who owed me two dollars back in the day, and I went up and knocked on the door, said, "I'm collecting my two—can I get my two dollars for the paper for the last month?"

And he said, "Get off my porch. Get out of here." Didn't say it like it, but he said, "Get the hell out of here."

So I went home and I told my dad, and so my dad went back and got the two bucks from the guy.

But in school, the social parties, the dances, all of those things, I didn't go to my Senior Ball, I didn't go to any dances, because—oh, the other thing was, I stuttered a lot and I couldn't speak well, so that was another handicap that didn't help me with the girls or anything. [laughs] So I just had a tough time within myself, going to school and doing all of that, and then I had a tough time on the social basis for the sleepouts, for all those kinds of things that people just enjoy and take for granted, I didn't take for granted because I didn't go to a lot of those things. I remember going to the place to get ready for the Junior Prom, and I would help them do it, then I didn't go because I didn't have a date.

So to make a long story short, I was not a very social person. I never dated. I couldn't talk, speak very well, so if it wouldn't have been for sports, I don't think I'd be here today.

But when I turned eighteen, I left Woodland for good, and I joined the military and I went to Germany, I went to Vietnam for a year, and when I came back, I was twenty-one. I say I went around the world because I went to Vietnam, it's halfway around the world. But I overcame some of my deficiencies, speaking for one. And then I started college. I went in under the G.I. Bill and went to Sac City College, right where we're at now.

Q Were you a Fellow or Felito or were you actually involved in the Mexican American Education Project?

[00:07:14]

Gonzales Well, I was at Sac City for two years. That was in 1969. A lot of us students started talking about the EOP Program. It was a version of the EOP Program, and I remember it was sort of the early stages when we were talking about it, and I think we had a room or something. We had something to help Latino students go to college, because financial aid was a biggie.

So in two years, I transferred to Sac State, CSU Sacramento, and that's when I came upon the Felito Program and Fellow Program. We were EOP students. There was another one, in fact, it's not here, but we were EOP students, and the EOP students was another segment of many students, but a lot of Latino students too. So we had the Felito Program, so we all mixed with all the other students in a different program, and that's when we had our MEChA meetings. We had MEChA meetings at

Sac State every Friday, and it was just a big coming together of all the Felitos, the Fellows, the EOP students, and anybody else who wanted to attend our MEChA meetings. So I remember going downtown in Sacramento for those meetings, and then we'd have the meeting, then we'd go have a party, and that was how we did it. So I wasn't in the Felito Program, but we knew many students who were. So, yes.

Q How did your participation in the Mexican American Education Project influence your thinking?

[00:08:58]

Gonzales Okay. I knew Steve Arvizu, who was the director, the project director, and what was good about being affiliated with them was that there was a lot of Latino cultural events that the Mexican American Education Project sponsored. And I can remember us being in the cafeteria on a Wednesday afternoon at 4:00 o'clock, and Steve Arvizu would come, because the cafeteria was here [demonstrates] and one building over was the Felito Project, where they were housed, and he'd come over and say, "There's a speaker at 5:00 o'clock, and I'm looking for students."

So we said, "Okay." We weren't even Felito. So we'd go attend a lot of those events.

They also brought Cesar Chavez to campus. I was able to hear Cesar speak at five different speeches. The first time I met him, I actually got to meet him, and I'd like to tell you about that. I was going to Sac State. I had a little Volkswagen. He was speaking in Marysville or Yuba City. And I was always late for everything, so I jumped in my car. He was speaking, I think, at 2:00 o'clock or something, so I drove from Sac State to Yuba City, which was about an hour drive, and I went and parked

my car, and I started running through lots of crowds, and I was pushing my way through, because I like to stay right there next to the stage, because I was sort of hard of hearing back then too. Now I'm real hard of hearing, but I was hard of hearing back then, too, at twenty-one.

At any rate, I was pushing, and this guy says, "Where you going?"

I said, "I'm going to go hear Cesar Chavez."

He says, "I'm Cesar." And this little Mexican, 5'5" and darker than me.

"You're Cesar?"

"Yeah, I'm Cesar." [laughs]

So I said, "Oh, *mucho gusto*." And I was just so amazed. Then I went right there where I wanted to be, and he gave his speech, great speech, talked about all of his—it's really funny, because you hear these politicians speak, and they speak about all these well-known people, and Cesar got up there and he told us about some of his colleagues, and he was saying Jesus Vata [phonetic] and Gonzales and Rodriguez and Martinez, you know, these people that nobody knew with Spanish surnames, and I'd never heard that before. All I'd heard was, you know, the big wheels, the big politicians. So, I mean, it was just really something.

So getting back to the project, there was a lot of culture, not just the Cesar Chavez speeches, but other events that were cultural events, parties, a lot of things. So we sort of mingled a lot with the Mexican American Project people, including the Fellows. We looked up to the Fellows because they were the leadership at our MEChA meetings, and then we were the workers and getting involved. So it was a nice time.

When you go to college, you don't have to look back at your hometown. You look at the future, and just some neat things. So if you can have those encounters that I was able to have, especially coming from Woodland when I had just the opposite, so it was sort of nice to get away from the hometown and see other people from other places and talk to them and date them. Oh, I started dating too. When I started rapping, talking better, I got to do the dating thing. So that was pretty good. So I enjoyed that as well.

Q How did your participation in the Mexican American Education Project influence your career and/or life's work?

[00:12:35]

Gonzales Well, I think just the awareness of the whole Chicano Movement at the time. We had the professors, like Professor [Senon M.] Valadez, Professor Joe Serna. Well, Joe Serna got us involved in the whole political—at the time, he was running a candidate, Manuel Ferrales, for city council in Sacramento, and so he got the students all involved, because he was our professor, so he said, "Hey, I've got a rally going on, so I need people." So he got me actually being involved, from knocking on doors to campaigning to supporting this guy. I never knew who Manuel Ferrales was. So, anyway, it wasn't just me, but a lot of students. So we'd go out and we'd go to this neighborhood and go to that neighborhood.

Anyway, we got him elected. Well, at his first city council meeting, I did not know that Manuel Ferrales could not even speak English. He spoke only Spanish. Because we never saw him. Because Joe Serna was his campaign manager, he did all the talking to all the media and talking to us, so we didn't know this Manuel fellow.

So I met Manuel Ferrales. I know he ran for two terms, and then I think he ran a third one, and I think he lost the third term. But he learned English, and he was a good leader.

But, anyway, I was very impressed with Joe Serna getting this guy elected, a Latino elected to the city council. The other thing is, look at the historical thing. Manuel Ferrales was the first Latino. Who was the second? Joe Serna, when he became mayor in 1990. Then the last, Eric Guerra, who just got elected a month ago from this date, or a week ago from this date. We've had three Latino, and I know all three of them. But it just impressed me that Joe was so—Joe was very down-to-earth. He could talk. He was a professor, he could talk. He inspired us. He inspired us.

Then when he had all this knowledge about voting, I mean campaigning, about knocking on doors and saying the right things with scripts and all that, not only did he do that, but we started going to the whole Cesar Chavez grape boycott, went to Safeways. It was neat, sort of walking around and telling people not to go into the store and don't eat grapes and all that. I was very excited. I mean, I knew who Cesar Chavez was like I know who Lincoln was, but, you know, for us to all be so involved, that he got us involved, he showed us how to.

And now I'm involved in campaigns in Davis. The last twenty school board members and city council members in Davis, I voted for all of them, and they all come to me now because they want me to work on their campaigns. I'm sort of the lawn-sign king of Davis now, so they want me. The ones that I support usually win, and we put the lawn signs out.

So my point is that because of what I learned at Sac State in that area has really transferred me now. I almost ran for school board this last time, but the only reason I didn't is because I run the Concilio thing, and I'll talk about that a little bit later. So, otherwise, I'm ready to be a candidate. When I first got to Davis thirty-five years ago, I couldn't run for dog catcher. But Davis has changed. I've been involved, very active in the community, and I've gotten a lot of awards, so people know me now, except for the new people, you know. So I think I can be a candidate now and I think I can win.

So, anyway, that was some of the influence I had from Sac State, bringing it to the present.

Q Did your study of cultural anthropology or knowledge of cultural issues influence your participation and involvement in the Movimiento Chicano? [00:16:43]

Gonzales Well, I was interested in the history of Mexico, and I've used it now in the way of the whole voting, you know. I realize now that—I mean, I didn't realize then. The demographics have changed so much so, 52 percent of K-through-12 are Latino now, students in elementary school in K-through-12. So I didn't realize that, because in Woodland, we were, oh, I'd say maybe 25 percent or maybe 20 percent Latino at the time. So that's why they could discriminate against us and it was real easy, because we were few and couldn't organize and all that stuff. So I just feel that I would make a difference if I could.

So I did take a class from Professor Joe Pitti, and the reason why I remember him, because I got a C, one of the lowest grades I got at Sac State, but I learned a lot.

He taught us about the history of Mexico and all the corruption and all the presidents that came and went, and the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, and all these people that were—and I guess the best way I can explain it is this guy Huerta, Feliciano—I can't recall his first name, but Huerta was running for president and he thought he lost, so he got on a boat and took off. He said, "I'm leaving Mexico."

So he took off, and then someone said, "Hey, wait a minute! We recounted. You won! You won!"

So he said, "Turn the boat around!" [laughs] So he came back to he could be president. But, I mean, just the whole corruption that was involved in that.

Mexico, to me, has the real high-class social class and the real low class, little or medium class, which is why the Mexicanos come here, you know, to get a better life. So studying that, you could see why the Mexicanos, the migrants, are not trustful of the government, because they're used to mistrust and distrust, and that's affected their voting tremendously, and I'll talk more about the voting at another question.

Q What are your earliest memories of events that attracted you to the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:19:16]

Gonzales Well, I said helping to elect Manuel Ferrales was a big thing. Getting involved in the whole grape boycott with Cesar Chavez, that was very important to me. Those are the early things I remember. I knew I couldn't join a fraternity, because I always thought that Latinos couldn't join fraternities, so then we got into MEChA, and MEChA *was* our fraternity. We had a better time in MEChA than the fraternal people did. We had our events, our parties, our meetings, our doing things that were

really necessary, our marches. I mean, just the whole enchilada was just there for us for participating. So all of those events, I think, helped me.

I remember we used to have the 16 de Septiembre celebration, and that was a big thing. Cinco de Mayo was a big thing. I just remember—you know what? I remember walking around Sac State. We would sit on the grass, and José Montoya would start strumming his guitar and singing *De Colores*. He put an EOP piece in there. I mean, they were very giving and we were ready to learn their lessons, and it was just—I mean, we felt strong and we felt important because, number one, we had a place. When I was in Woodland, I had no place, so it was from no place to some place, and that's real important to me as an individual, because I started getting more confidence in myself that we could do it.

And what's funny now is now I'm the elder now, because a lot of those folks have passed on, and so the lessons we have learned from them are—so I like to give them credit. And I want to mention some others as well, José Montoya, Francisco Codena [phonetic], Esteban Villa, the artist. Him and José were—and then Alvino Chavez, and I want to mention Alvino Chavez because I went to his funeral. Alvino was a mainstay at Sac State. I don't know if he was ever registered for a class, probably wasn't, but he was there every day, and he started this Chicanito Science Project in the elementary schools. We all looked at him—I thought he was a professor at first because he talked pretty good and he was with all the head honchos, so we thought he was sort of a—we found out later that he was just not even a registered student. [laughs] He'd been there for ten years at Sac State.

When I went to his funeral, his nephew got up there and said, "You know, one time I went with my uncle Alvino to the Capitol, and they were serving a lunch, and Alvino was in charge. He knew the governor and all the big wheels, and I was just there saying, 'How do you know all—?' They all knew my uncle Alvino."

So I guess my point is this: the Movement was there for anybody. Alvino didn't graduate from—-I don't believe he graduated from Sac State, but he had an influence on us, and he was there. He added a lot to our activities. And the Chicanito—I said, "What is that?" He would go to the elementary schools and get the Latino students involved in science projects. I said, "How'd you come up with that?" Because I just knew we went out and would drink beer together. This guy had another side to him.

So I was very thankful that I went to his funeral. Not a lot of people from Sac State went. I got up and said some things about him, because he was a friend of mine. He came over to my house and we had a lot of goings-on together.

So I think all those people, some of them have passed on and some of them haven't, but they've all been influential in one way or another to make me who I am today.

Q How did other Mexicans, Mexican Americans, or Latinos reacted to the term *Chicano* and *Movimiento Chicano*?

[00:23:29]

Gonzales I'm sorry. Give me that question again. Why did we use the word *Chicano*?

Q No, how did Mexican Americans and Latinos react to the terms *Chicanos* and *Movimiento Chicano*?

[00:23:40]

Gonzales For me, it was no problem, because I can remember back home we'd talk about Chicanos, you know. It was just a term. I remember Cesar Chavez called us—he said, "We're Chicanos." That was good enough for me. If Cesar Chavez validated it, then we were Chicanos, so I had no problem saying it. I was a Chicano because *Latino* hadn't arrived yet. *Latino* was down the road still. So we were Mexicans and we were Mexican Americans. I didn't mind *Mexican American* too bad. I just didn't like the hyphen, you know, because they weren't German Americans, they were just Americans, and we were hyphenated. I've always rejected the hyphen.

But then *Chicano* was just—to me, *Chicano*, I felt the activists were more Chicano, you know. In fact, we had this sort of hierarchy. If you were Mexican, you were from Mexico. If you were Mexican American, you were born here and you didn't get too involved. And if you were Chicano, you were born here, but you were an activist. You could be from Mexico and be a Chicano too. Like Juan, he was in the Fellow Program, he was from Mexico, but he said, "I'm a Chicano too," because he was active, even though he was from Mexico.

So I think we can call anything what we want to be called, as long as we can defend it. I think that's the key. So if you can't defend it, then, "Oh, they don't know what to be called," you know. But my biggest validator was Cesar Chavez said, "I'm a Chicano," and that was good enough for me. So I'm a Chicano too. And then we

were all saying *Chicano*. We all were calling ourselves Chicano at the time for the Chicano Movement, which the Movimiento adopted it as well, probably because of Cesar.

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

[00:25:33]

Gonzales You know, I remember when I was in the Army for three years, I heard there was a lot of things with the African Americans and they were protesting and all of that. I didn't think too much about Latinos, because I wasn't that aware of what was going on with the Chicano Movement at the time anyway. So I was just sports. If it wouldn't have been for sports, like I said, I'd be six feet under by now. So that was my only thing I did well, you know. You sort of do the things that you do well. You go back to those. I was a sports guy, and I didn't pull any punches. I knew that's what I was. At Sac State, I played on the MEChA basketball club. We took on the Blacks, we took on the Asians.

After I got out of Sac State, I went sports ways, and I'll talk about that when you ask me questions about that after.

Q Did your involvement in the Movimiento Chicano change you personally?

[00:26:34]

Gonzales Does it sound like it changed me personally? I guess I just—how can I—I always wanted to go back to my school, to Woodland High School, and I wanted to show them that, you know, yeah, I wasn't a very good student, but I'm getting better, you know? And so I can remember going back. At Sac State, I think the MEChA group, I was on the Education Committee, and we were recruiting, so I went

back. I said, “I want to go back to Woodland High School, because that’s where I graduated from.” And we went back there. We recruited. I wanted to look at some of those teachers who thought I was a nobody and going nowhere real fast, that I was going to be a somebody, but I got to do that even later, and I’ll talk about that later on as well.

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

[00:27:27]

Gonzales I think the Chicanas were every bit as important as the Chicano, you know? When I saw the movie, the Cesar Chavez movie that just came out last year, Dolores Huerta was not portrayed that involved, and she *was* involved. She was right next to Cesar all the way. I met Dolores Huerta. She’s come to the Cesar Chavez Conference that we have. She didn’t come this year, but she’s come the three previous years. I’ve heard her talk. I met her. I talked with her. She’s still doing it at eight-five years old. She looks pretty good, she sounds real good. She has something called the Dolores Huerta Training—some kind of a program that she has. So she’s doing the same thing she was going back then, just in a different kind of realm.

And the Latinas were always with us. We were always with the—it was the guys and the girls, whether it was at the dances or at the picket line. Then of the Fellows, we knew more of the males, but there were some females that were pretty good, too, that I remember. And I just respected all of them, because we were nothing and they were like a level above us, you know, because most of us were going to B.A.s and they were going for master’s degrees, so they had already their B.A. and

they had already worked, we hadn't done any of that. So we looked up to them. I think even though they weren't in the forefront, they were as important as anybody else.

The other thing is I look at my own family. When my father was going to all those meetings, my mom was home taking care of the kids, and she did cook and raise—*she* raised us, to be perfectly honest with you. My wife gives me the same thing. "Oh, you're always gone," because I go to meetings every night. So she's taking care—but you know what? That could be true. I still try to do my thing and drive the kids to all the soccer games and practices and all the functions and all of that.

But I think the Latina is as important, if not more important. And I always say behind every great man there's a great woman. So I believe they were left out of the history books, they were left out of all the big action things, but they were there. They were there. Even if it's not written, I know they were there in the background, because you got to eat, and raising kids is not easy. So I know that the women played a vital role, if they only did that.

Q What did you personally initiate or help initiate in the Movimiento Chicano? [00:30:09]

Gonzales Well, I've done more things recently than I did—

[recorder turned off]

[00:30:18]

Gonzales Want to repeat that?

Q What did you personally initiate or help initiate in the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:30:24]

Gonzales Well, when I was a student, I just participated. I didn't initiate anything. I did serve on the Senate, the Student Senate of the student government at Sac State. In that role, because, like I said, I was sports, so I started the intercollegiate soccer team at Sac State in 1971. We had to go around and get petitions, which I did easily, because we'd go in the cafeteria and pass around the petition, and there's 500 people in there. Four hundred signed the petition, so getting the petition was the easy way. But it was a time and it was a place to start something athletically, sports. In fact, I played on—the first year when I was a senior, I got to play. I scored one goal against University of Washington, and that's my claim to fame. Then I became a soccer coach, after I graduated, at Sacramento High School, and I did some neat things there.

See, it wasn't all that pleasant at Sac State. It was very pleasant, but I was an athlete. I was a jock, so I was singled out for that, because most of the hardcore Latinos, they were artists. Well, I wasn't an artist. I can't even draw. I draw a person, they're little stick men. That's all I could draw. But there were these people that were doing the posters for all the events. The artists were just doing *great* things. So the art students, they would just envelope them more than they enveloped us, me. So I felt a little left out. I wasn't an artist.

But I guess what I'm trying to say is that I think the Movimiento encompassed everybody, just like Alvino. Alvino wasn't an artist either, but he had his thing and he did very well. So I think the fact that I was a sports guy and then I started the soccer team, because I wasn't the only Latino playing on that first soccer team. I remember

[unclear]. There was about five Latinos that played on that first soccer team. If I go see a soccer game over there at Sac State now, I'll bet you there's five or ten Latinos playing on that team too. So what we started was sort of a neat thing, even though it didn't have so much with the—I mean, we have to get involved in the community. We can't just not be involved. So I felt like that was a big deal for me to start the intercollegiate soccer thing. So I've got students now that are going to go to Sac State, and I said, "Hey, I started the soccer team way back then." [laughs]

And the other thing I did back then was I was an announcer at the soccer games. We put some games on the radio station. There was a radio station at Sac State, and so I think I announced about five soccer games, and it was really neat. Then I got to be announcer one more time. They brought the Mexican team from Mexico, from I don't know where, Guadalajara or someplace, Mexico City, but, anyway, they needed someone to pronounce the Spanish surnames, so I got to call again. So that was really neat, in front of the gym, a Latino calling, and I got to do a little announcing too. [laughs] [demonstrates] So I did that thing.

But as far as the big things, they would come later in my life, as far as initiating things, which is what I'm doing now.

Q Did the Movimiento Chicano raise your consciousness along social, cultural, political lines?

[00:34:03]

Gonzales Of course it did. Sure, it did. I remember the Southwest Voter Registration, it was a project that came and were trying to register Latinos. This is back in the sixties and seventies, late seventies and eighties. I remember they were

giving something like, oh, three dollars for each person you registered, so we wanted to register Latinos, which gets into the whole voting thing. I hope to be able to see, before I die—a bucket list—I want to see a Latino governor in California, and we've got a real good candidate, Villaraigosa from L.A., that could do that.

But the fact of the matter is that there's 50,000 Latinos turn eighteen every month in these whole United States. If we could just get those 50,000 or 40,000 to register, we'd take over the whole United States. Then maybe I might see a Latino president. But our Latinos, we're just not geared on that. For example, me, I was twenty-one when I registered to vote the first time. I've never missed a vote. I feel voting is very important, but a lot of our people don't, and they don't trust it from the history that we came from Mexico. It's partly the reason why they don't vote, but a lot of them just don't think their vote counts. So it makes it tough, because now we're running Latino candidates. Look at the Capitol. Term limits has been a *big* help to Latinos because now after two terms, you have to go away, so new people get to come in. Some of those new people are Latinos. Somebody said that they never heard Spanish being spoke in the Capitol like it is now, because we have I don't know how many assemblymen and senators, but we didn't have any before. We had very few before, and now we've got a lot more. Now we're running for city councils and school board, and that's where it all starts. So my feeling is that if we could just get our people to register to vote, boy, everything's going to turn Chicano because of the power of the political numbers, just numbers alone, you know.

The other thing was Prop 187 was really a neat thing. Prop 187 said that the Latinos couldn't even go to school, you couldn't teach bilingual education and all

that. I always said as a teacher I'm not going to ask a kid if he's got a [unclear]. I'm a teacher. I'll teach whoever walks through that door. But 187 made a lot of older Latinos who had never thought about registering to vote, it was a backlash, and a lot of them, monolingual, whatever, they registered to vote, including my father-in-law, including people that I knew that never voted before, because they were mad at this guy that was saying the Mexicans couldn't come in no more, you know. This was Pete Wilson, who was the governor that started that 187, and I'll tell you, it sure backfired on him. So a lot of these Latinos registered to vote. If you're not familiar with something, you're not going to get involved with it.

Now here's the other thing. The students that go to college, oh, they're all very—like yourself, they—are you registered to vote?

Q [inaudible]

[00:37:49]

Gonzales I rest my case. The point is that the ones that are going to college now, they will be acculturated to voting. You better. I'm going to go get two applications and I'm going to bring them back, and I'm going to register you two.

But the problem is, a lot of students, a lot of Latino students are dropping out of high school, so they don't even get a chance to go to college. So we need to fix that. We need to get you young people to vote when you're especially in college. I know UC Davis has the College Dems, because they come to our meetings. I'm a member of the Davis Democratic Club. I'm the vice president. We have meetings every month. The College Dems come and they register over 1,000 students every

year, every fall. That's one of the first things that they do. Election years, they'll register more.

And it's so easy to register college kids, because instead of voting—for example, you're from San Diego, because everyone from Southern California comes to Davis, everyone from Davis goes to Southern California, so those people that come in, they can vote here, then send a sample ballot to—not the sample ballot, but the ballot that they send you and you have to send it back. You don't know what's going on because you're going to school here. You need to know what's going on *here*, and you know what's going on by seeing who your local officials are. So your vote is more important here than it is if you send it back. Instead of sending it back, you just go into the poll and vote. It's real simple.

So they register over 1,000 and more during—I know, because we support them. We give them money to do that, and I'm very impressed by the college kids that are getting re-registered. They're not getting registered; they're getting re-registered, because they already registered in their own hometowns.

Q How did these changes impact your personal relationships with your family members and peers?

[00:39:51]

Gonzales Well, like I said, my father was a leader, and I'll tell you a story. He got me into Concilio. Okay. My father started the Mexican American Concilio of Yolo County in 1970. It started outside of the Catholic Church, or within the Catholic Church. Him and about fifteen other Latinos got together. They wanted to talk about rights and voting and getting jobs, getting housing, getting acceptance in Woodland.

Like I said, there was very few Latinos at the time, about 20 percent, so it was easy to discriminate against them.

So the Concilio started. The Concilio started. Back then, they got funding, and my father became the executive director, which he was executive director from 1970 till he passed away in 2004. So the Concilio started having activities and doing events and stuff. They started this dinner in 1983, and this dinner was to recognize Latinos, because the Anglo community would not recognize us. They would have Citizen of the Year, they would have other citizens that were honored, but Latinos didn't. So we did it. So the Concilio did their own thing. They had a dinner, and it was four Latinos, and we started honoring ourselves, I mean our Latino colleagues. So he was the executive director.

Then, like I said, they got some seed money from the federal government, from the state government, from the county government, and so they opened up an office. He had about five full-time employees and about seven part-time employees. They did things from translations to job referrals to social services to education.

In fact, let me tell you what he did in education. It was really neat. 1972, Woodland High School had no bilingual teachers at Woodland High School, so he went down there, knocked on the school and said, "Hey, we want some bilingual teachers." 1972, I was one of the candidates over there. And guess who was going to interview me? My father. And back then, I was going to Sac State. I was making my way here at Sacramento High School. The principal here really wanted me bad, because he wanted me to start a soccer program or to be a coach and get that whole thing started. So I didn't stay in Woodland. I said, "I can't stay. I'm only going to get

the job because my father and I—." And this guy didn't know me. I wanted to sort of make my own—you know, branch out on your own.

As a result of that hiring teachers, there were teachers from the project that went to work there. Evilia Genera put in forty years. She just retired last year, and she was the principal of Woodland High School for about the last, oh, six years to seven years. So my point is, is that now because of what happened in 1973 with the bilingual teachers, now Woodland, they have many, many bilingual teachers, they have bilingual programs, they have bilingual administrators, and, in fact, the superintendent is a Mexicana, is a Latina. So Concilio made some real good moves.

In 1975, the Concilio sued Yolo County because they didn't have any employees—they were all White, none were Latino. So in 1975, they sued and won the lawsuit. This is before my time. I'm in Concilio now, but this was before my time. I was over here doing my thing with the schools, teaching and coaching. So this is back in Woodland. So they sued them, and then they hired an affirmative action officer who was an EOP student. Campos was his name. I can't remember his first name. But he became the affirmative action officer for Woodland and was full-time position, and they started hiring Latinos, and now I'm happy to report that of the 1,200 employees in Yolo County now, one-third are Latino. So this is the impact that Concilio had in Yolo County.

So, anyway, my father brought me along, got me on the board of directors in '95, and then I became a vice president of the Concilio, and then I became president of Concilio in 2000, and I've been president ever since. Now I'm Concilio. But my Concilio had been Concilio for all those years, and when he had the office when the

money dried up, of course money dried up here when they stopped funding all those nonprofits, and so what he did was he started working out of his kitchen at his house [laughs], running the Concilio.

So all the people have passed away now, except I have one board member, one of the originals that helped form the Concilio back in 1970. He's still with us, and he's about eighty-five, eighty-six years old now, and he's still on the board. So I always look to him to be the—he's the elder now of the organization, and he's seen us from infancy to the present. I'll talk about some of the Concilio, what I've done with it.

Q Please describe some of your impacts that your involvement with the Movimiento Chicano had on your career.

[00:45:41]

Gonzales Well, I think I've given you a lot of what I've experienced along the way. Today I feel like a spokesman for—I feel like what my pop did for our community for Woodland, I'm doing for—like I said, I didn't want to go back to Woodland, so I moved to Davis in 1975, and I just didn't want to go back to Woodland. I already told you why. So I felt like, you know, I'm just going to make my mark here. I'm just going to do it. And there wasn't that many Latinos in Davis. But I didn't get too far from Woodland, but I got out of Woodland, ten miles.

So, anyway, I was a sports guy, so all my kids played sports, so I coached them in softball, baseball, football, soccer, tennis, everything.

So then in 1983, there was an incident that happened at Davis High School. A Special Ed kid got killed in the parking lot. The reason he was killed was because he

was Vietnamese. So he got in a fight with a student. In fact, the guy who got killed, Thong [Hy Huynh], who got killed, he just wanted to help out. It was two other people that were fighting. It was a White guy, a real big guy, and this little Asian guy. So Thong went to help out, and so the guy got so mad that, after fighting, he went to his car and he got a sword out. He got the sword and he went like this [demonstrates]. When he went like this [demonstrates], this is when he stabbed Thong. In fact, my brother was a police officer at the time, and Thong died in his arms that very same day.

So as a result of that, the City of Davis started the Davis Human Relations Commission, and I applied and I said, "I've got to jump into something." I was doing the coaching and the teaching. It was hard to come over here and teach all day, then go back over there and coach and be father, husband, and all of that. And I hadn't been involved before, so I said, "I'm going to go for this." So I started on the Human Relations Commission, and I started just as a member, then I became chair in 1988, I believe.

Then we did a whole year study in Davis about discrimination. We were one of the first ones that started. In fact, your "Principles of Community at UCD," you got that from us at the city, because we did our own—I'm talking we did a whole year's study of the discrimination that took place. We talked to the businesspeople, we talked to the newspapers, we talked to the police department. Police department had no Latino officers. We talked to UCD in general. We talked to the city offices. We did for a whole year, we had these workshops where people could just come in. A lot

of students would come in and talk about the schools. I said, “We don’t have any power over the schools. We have only power over the city.”

But because I was a teacher and because I said, “We’re going to make some recommendations about the schools because there’s so many parents are so upset their kids are getting suspended, that they’re minority,” so what we did was we came up with fifty-one recommendations, and the city council approved them [snaps fingers] just like that, because they were so needed. We talked about more police officers. We were talking about the merchants. “Just because a Latino or an African American go into your establishment, serve them. Don’t sit there, look at them until they leave and think they’re going to steal something.” Because “Driving while black” or “Driving while brown,” if you had a car, the police would get on your tail and tail you all around. I mean, it was awful, awful things. These recommendations had a big impact on Davis.

And we had ten recommendations for the schools. One of the recommendations was to start Human Relations Committees at each school, so these parents who were coming to complain about why their sons and daughters were being expelled—not expelled, but being suspended and expelled, they could go and talk to a group that would listen to them.

At the time my kids were in school, I was on the Human Relations Committees at my school. We did some great things. In fact, at Holmes Junior High School—I’ll never forget—I did a Minority Career Day, and the vice principal says, “There’s not that many Latinos. You won’t get—.”

I said, “Thank you. Let me try.”

So I went out and I recruited fifty Latinos. I got my dad, I got my correctional officers, I got lawyers, I got doctors, and we had fifty-five speakers that came to this Career Day. So the students got to hear three different speeches. After the whole thing was over, the counselor came up to me. She says, "Rick," she says, "this was different." Because they have Career Day every year. She said, "This was sure different from all the rest of them. What was the difference?"

I said, "Let me tell you what the difference is. The difference is minority people, Latinos especially, we don't just go to high school, go to college, and become a teacher. We go to high school, we go in the service, we get married, we get a job, we get divorced, we get this, we get that, and then we be coming way down the road here. So it was harder for us to attain this position of authority, or these positions, so it comes from the inside. We have more to give and sort of relate to these people."

And then I got some award for it from the county or something, gave me some award, because it was a neat thing. But the most important thing was the students that were involved, that students got to hear from minority people who they'd never heard from before.

So the next year, they had it again and I couldn't do it because I was busy doing other things, so it just faltered and just fell apart. Then they went back to what they do now, which is the same old Career Day, you know.

But what I'm trying to say is that I didn't know what my father's master plan was. My father's master plan was me taking over Concilio, and I didn't realize that at the time. But from 2000 to 2004, I was the president and we collaborated, we talked about the meetings and we attended the meetings together. My father, in his later

years, he wasn't as vocal as he was before. He just didn't have the oomph. I said, "Pop, you got to go with me on this thing so we can move this stuff forward."

So, anyway, he passed away in 2004, so I continued. I started taking over this dinner. I remember him talking about the Concilio, Mexican American Concilio of Yolo County. Since 1998, I started the scholarship program, because I was a teacher. I started with two scholarships that we gave in 1998, and then we increased it. As we did this, I brought students. Remember I told you about this dinner that they had? They didn't make any money off it, but we started making money off it, and I started honoring students. We wanted to honor two Latino students from each of the seven comprehensive high schools in Yolo County, and we did that. So the first year we had two scholarships, then we went to six scholarships, we went to twelve scholarships. All twelve of the kids that we honored all got scholarships.

Then we went beyond that. From 2004 till 2008, before the economy took a nosedive, we were giving eighty scholarships. We gave five scholarships to every high school. We served fifteen schools in Yolo County only, in Yolo County only, so we gave five scholarships to each high school and continuation school, so a total of twenty-one schools. So from 2004 to 2008, we gave eighty, fifty-five to the schools and we gave twenty-five to nonprofits who cared about poor people, who help poor people, the Food Bank in Davis STEAC. I don't know if you know what STEAC is, a short-term for homeless people to get funds for a hotel room or for a meal. We gave them to the Power Yolo in Woodland, which is the old Domestic Violence Commission. There was twenty to twenty-five entities, nonprofits, that help poor people. You had to help poor people, not something else. You had to help poor

people. So we gave those for four years. We gave $500 to each one of those organizations, and they were very happy, because we were making money. We were making money, so it was really good.

I did most of the work, just like how I pick up the phone, and now we have 100 sponsors. I was going to bring one of my programs. I should have. But, anyway, we have 100 sponsors, and I have one event that's taking place in October, we have 400 people, and I've expanded, not just Latinos. We honor someone from the African American community, someone from the Asian community, someone from Native American community, and someone from the Anglo community. So they wouldn't honor us, but we're going to honor them, you know. This thing went from 100 people that used to come to the Concilio event and now we get 400 people that attend. Now we have 100 sponsors. I remember when I took over, we had four sponsors. Now I have 140 sponsors. So we're now averaging fifty-six. We've given a total of 750 scholarships. In fact, next month I'll be going to fifty graduations and Senior Nights to award my scholarships, to formally award my scholarships.

We honor two students from each of the high schools at my events, and they give speeches and we honor them with a plaque and a scholarship, and I get from the Assembly and Congressman Garamendi's office, from Assembly member—now it's Bill Dodd, from Mariko Yamada before, and from Senator Wolk's office we get these resolutions and give them to the students.

It's a big event, and I have a nice website with all of these things, so I want you guys to check me out to see that I'm not just saying stuff and blowing in the wind.

I want to tell you that the best comment I ever received was from an Asian guy who came to one of our Concilio meetings with me and my dad. I'll never forget it. And I've received a whole bunch of awards. I'll talk about that in a minute. But this Asian guy, after attending one of our Concilio meetings, he come back and he wanted to talk to me and my dad. He said, "You know what?" He said, "You guys walk the walk and you talk the talk." And you know what? From all the awards I've gotten, that's been the most meaningful of all of them. Here's a guy that just came off the street and just saw us in one meeting and made that comment, you know. I know my dad felt proud and I felt proud, because it very impactful.

So talking about Concilio, so we've given 750 scholarships so far, and my goal was to give 1,000 by 2020, and I think I can do that. The problem is if the good Lord keeps me around, because when I go, the scholarships are going to go with me, because I don't have anyone else to take my place. My father was lucky. My son won't be able to do what I was able to do, so it's just one of those things that's going to sort of go with me when I go, so if the good Lord keeps me around, we're going to keep on doing it.

The other thing is, it's getting hard. To run something like this is really tough. The other thing is, I don't belong to only Concilio. I'm on the boards of five organizations. One is the YIIN. YIIN is the Yolo Interfaith Immigration Network. We just had a fundraiser last Saturday, two days ago. We made $15,000 on a dinner. We had about 160 people. We had sponsors and we made a lot of money. With this amount of money, this money will all go to DACA, to pay for DACA people, the DREAMers, who were born here and they didn't realize they didn't have papers until

they applied for a driver's license, and now they're fearful of being deported. If they get that DACA certificate, they're good for two years they won't be deported. They can work and they go to school, they can do anything. So that's $465 for two years. I thought it was just a one-time thing and they were okay, but you've got to pay for it every two years, so there's just an ongoing need for these things. So that's where our money goes to for the YIIN group.

I also belong to the Center for Families. The Center for Families is located in Woodland. There's some satellites in Davis, at Margaret Montgomery Elementary School and on D Street there's a little house there where they have services for the Center for Families. In 2010, this group had 1,000 people come through their doors and give them everything from how to find food, how to find a job, to how to pay their taxes. They do this. There's the VITA group that does their taxes for free, and there's been so many of these taxes from the people that they've gained over a million dollars that has stayed in Yolo County, refunds, because they don't pay any money to do this preparation. That's at the Center for Families.

We're going to have a fundraiser for them on May 2nd. We're going to have a bicycle/run in Davis. We hope to raise about $10,000, hopefully, for the Center for Families. It's a nonprofit organization that has about twenty employees, and they base the money on recs from different locations and different things. So I've been on this board for about five years, but this is the one that helps the neediest, the poorest. They're stationed in Woodland. They have satellites in Knights Landing, in West Sacramento, in Davis now, and so it's a real important group. So I'm real proud of that.

The other thing is, I'm the vice president of the Davis Democratic Club, and with that, that's where I use this thing that I talked about that Joe Serna taught us, about all the campaigning, that's where I do my campaigning things. I remember when I first moved to Davis, I'd go ask the candidate, "Can I be in your campaign and I'll do what I can?" Now they come to me. All these people, they call me up, "Rick, I want you on my campaign. You're the first one I'm asking." So I've had all these politicians now come to my house, and they sit down there, because I've got to interview them and make sure that they are going to be helpful to me and my mission, you know. So they come and I interview them, then I say, "Okay, I will support you," or, "No, I'm not going to support you." So that has all turned around from when I was begging them to be on their campaign. Now they're asking me to be on their campaigns. So that's turned around.

So those are most of the organizations that I belong to, and that's why I say I'm pretty active, because I go to meetings almost every night, do that. The other thing is, I'm raising three grandchildren right today that live with me, and I have a father-in-law that stays with us two weeks out of six weeks, so we're just busy, busy all the time, from fundraiser to events to meetings to this to that. And now that I'm an elder, I'm sort of doing what Senon Valadez and what all these José Montoyas and Joe Sernas did for us. We're passing along the torch. I wish I could find someone to take on Concilio, because I don't think that's going to work, but I'd sure to have somebody take on that role, because it does such important work. These scholarships is the only way I know to make the equalizer for Latinos or minorities, is to get your education and get in those slots where you can make a difference policy-wise.

Q Would you say that some things were left unresolved in the Movimiento Chicano?

[01:03:26]

Gonzales Well, yes, work is never done. We'll die off and you guys will take our places, and you'll die off. But here's a couple things that I think is real important. Number one, closing the achievement gap. I mentioned before that K-through-12 is 52 percent Latino, okay, which is we're the majority. Now, how many teachers are—something that Joe Serna taught me a long time ago is called parity. Parity means if you have 52 percent of the population is Latino, then you should have 52 percent of the teaching force should also be Latino. Guess what it is in the state of California: 16.23 percent of all teachers in California are Latino. So there's the gap. You have 16.6 minus 52, that's where we don't have enough teachers, so we need to get our Latino students better educated, we need to send them to college. That's why I'm giving the scholarships. We need to close this achievement gap that's been around for too long.

And here's the problem: Latinos and African American students score the same, whether they're in Woodland or Davis or Sacramento or New York City or L.A., but the White students and the Asian students score way up here [demonstrates]. This creates this gap. That's why we have an achievement gap. In Davis for the last ten years, I've been on these committees, the Education Committee, about closing the achievement gap, very, very important to me. So before I go to my grave, I want to try to have something to close that achievement gap. And there's a lot of reasons. It's poverty and our parents weren't educated. My dad went to the fifth

grade, even though he could speak to the governor and all these elected officials, because he was just lucky, because he worked in a barbershop and, I don't know, he just learned to speak well. He was self-educated, sort of like Cesar Chavez was. So we need to increase our students.

I was from Woodland. I know my generation, a lot of those Latinas, they got pregnant. We lost a whole generation of Latinas because they get pregnant, the boyfriends took off, and they had to raise their kids, you know, all that. So it's very, very important for me to realize that our Latino students from high school—well, first of all, we've got to get more Latino teachers out there, and I know that because I taught for thirty-six years in Sac City Unified School District. The majority of teachers are Anglo women, there's no question about that. I saw in the lunchrooms and in the teacher lounges, they talk about, "Oh, Juan, his parents speak Spanish, so forget him." So they don't reach out. They don't reach out to help the Latino student. If the parents speak another language, they just—so the students go through, they drop out, who cares? That's why the prison population of California is two-thirds Latino and Black, and yet we're smaller population, but we are the majority there. So we need to send our kids to school.

I'm happy to report that—here's going to be some information for you two—UC Davis has now 21 percent Latino students, undergraduates. When it reaches 25 percent, then you become an HSI, Hispanic-Serving Institution. Once that happens, the federal government will kick in thousands of dollars for outreach. One of the things is for the Cesar Chavez, they were giving us 10,000. Next year, we're going to get 20,000, because UCD is real close to being an HSI, Hispanic-Serving Institute.

Sac State already is an HSI, some of the state colleges, some of the universities, but once that happens, more money comes in for outreach, for tutoring, for financial aid. It's going to flow. It's going to happen.

I think the target is for 2020 for UC Davis. I know it could happen in 2018, especially I said, "Hire me. I'll go get the—." Because next year's freshman class at UCD, 80,000 students have applied. One-third of those are Latino. So our Latino students, God bless them, are doing better in high school. I think that dropout rate that we said 50 percent for so long, I know that has shrunk, because we're getting students. I'm giving scholarships to students who are qualified for UCD, DACA students that aren't even eligible to go to college to get financial aid anyway, but they're being admitted to university.

I guess the final thing I want to say is that I like going back to my high school, because now I'm somebody. When I go back to that high school to give my scholarships, first of all, I tell them, "I'm a graduate from Woodland High School." I don't tell them when I graduated, because it was 100 years ago. But I said, "You know what? I have a message for the teachers and for the counselors at this school. Don't give up on those C students, because that's all I was, was a C student. And you know those A and B students who were smarter than me? I don't see them on this stage giving *any* scholarships. I'm giving five scholarships. I'm giving fifty-five for the whole county, but I don't see them giving any scholarships. So don't give up on those C students, because some of them are going to make it." I don't know if I was lucky. When I went through, I think I earned everything that I received. I've told you

my awards. I don't know if you want to know that. But, anyway, I feel that don't give up on those C students, because some of them are going to make it.

Now, I'll finish up with I received Citizen of the Year in Davis two years ago. A year ago, I received the one I'm pretty proud of, is the Educators International Hall of Fame, and that's out of the Sacramento area. That's because of my teaching ability, not so much the coaching, but my teaching ability. There's only three people in Davis that have this distinction. So I received those awards. I received some awards from the PG&E, the Hispanic this.

So I've received a lot, a number of awards, and I'm thankful. That's cool, but that's not what we do it for. We have a mission, I guess from when I first started at Sac State to now, and I know that this guy David Armendariz, who was the president of the Concilio at one time, he lives in San Diego or Mexico, I don't know, he goes back and forth. But, anyway, the other thing I didn't say was that the Concilio, we honor adults, we honor ten adults. We honored David one time, got him to come back here, gave an award. I interviewed him just before the—because I couldn't interview him from San Diego. So he said, "Man, Rick, this is—." Because he remembers Concilio just not making any money on the little event. Now we make 25,000 on this one event. I just have one event, made 25,000, give it all in scholarships. Next year we start over again, and that's what we've been doing.

So I feel like we've made an impact. I feel like I'm on a mission, and I guess my mission will end, like when his mission is going to end, when we take that journey to the final resting place. So I don't know. I feel important in a way. These guys don't know what I do, because it's Sacramento, but Yolo County, I'm going to

give you my card and I'm going to give him my card, so you check out my website and you'll see that everything I've said is *la pura verdad*.

[End of interview]