

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

Juan Donaldo Pedro Hernández

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Senon Valadez
June 30, 2015

Transcription by Katie Nguyen and Technitype Transcripts

Valadez For the record, state your full name.

[00:00:09]

Hernández Juan Donaldo Pedro Hernández.

Valadez Good. Your birthdate?

[00:00:16]

Hernández 6/25/33.

Valadez Married?

[00:00:21]

Hernández Yes.

Valadez And children?

[00:00:23]

Hernández Five.

Valadez What are their ages today, approximately?

[00:00:28]

Hernández Fifty is the eldest and it goes down to about thirty-five.

Valadez They're all living in Sacramento?

[00:00:37]

Hernández No, they're scattered everywhere. My eldest son lives in Australia, has been there for over ten years, probably will never come back, although he comes to visit us, very successful there. My eldest daughter lives in Santa Rosa. My next son lives in Maryland, and I have two other daughters who live in the East Bay, and that's it. I have a granddaughter who lives somewhere in Roseville.

Valadez Great. Where were you born?

[00:01:13]

Hernández In Watts, Los Angeles, California.

Valadez Were you raised there?

[00:01:19]

Hernández Part of the time, my earliest childhood. Well, let me see. The first three years, I was raised there in the family, and I have a few memories of that, but then after that, we went to the interior of Mexico and we lived for a while in Yurécuaro, Michoacán, where my mother's people come from. We got to see what the culture was like, what people are like, find relatives. I learned a lot about the culture, and I was at the right age where it became my identity, so that all my life I've never said I am a Latino or Hispanic or a Mexican American. I've always said I'm a Mexican.

I was fully bilingual at one time, but my circumstances of my life from adolescence on did not permit me to use the language, so I lost it, I lost the facility and didn't develop it. But being fully bilingual, though, introduced me to certain problems when I went to school that I remember quite vividly, one being I couldn't

read very well. In fact, I read poorly. But I was saved by a teacher—I'll never forget her—her name was Mrs. Black, elementary school teacher, who took the patience, took the time to teach me how to sound words phonetically and I learned to read, and that was crucial to my development. It also emphasized the value of education, as did my grandparents. I knew mainly my maternal grandparents. My paternal grandparents never came here. They remained in Mexico, although I met them when we used to live down there. The maternal grandparents came here, they crossed the border, paid two cents for every person, and my grandfather got a job with Southern Pacific Railroad.

The family history is marked by different aunts and uncles born along the southern route, and they ended up in what is now Beverly Hills, used to be open bean fields and oil wells when they arrived there. Their nearest relatives—oh, all of a sudden, I've lost it. It was a famous comedian who used to invite my mother into their homes and my uncles into their homes, and they became playmates with the children of that family. God, I've lost the name. But anyway, they ended up there, but then in a couple of years settled in what is now Sawtelle. That's in West Los Angeles.

My parents divorced, the family fell apart, and so at one point I went to live with my father in Texas. Are you from Texas, by any chance?

Valadez Yes, I am. Sanderson.

[00:04:34]

Hernández Oh, so you know what it's like to live there. I remember when I arrived at El Paso looking out the window, that wasn't my destination, but looking out the window, horses and horse-drawn carriages, and I was not accustomed to that

from Los Angeles. [laughs] Ended up in Tyler, Texas, East Texas, where there's a tremendous amount of discrimination against anybody who's dark-skinned. Anyway, so I learned about that as well.

But before that, I lived a while with my maternal grandparents. Now, here they were indigenous people who struggled their way here, struggled making a living in Los Angeles, but because of where they first landed, in what is now Beverly Hills, they had certain connections with wealthy people, and so those families always made sure that various of the adults in the family had some kind of work. My grandfather started doing yardwork for people, became a gardener for the rich and the famous, and that's how that family survived. There were eleven of them, eleven children.

But at the end of the day, his working for others and my grandmother raising her eleven children, they would sit at the kitchen table—and I remember sitting with them—and they would take out pencil and paper and they would practice writing their name. They didn't have formal education. All they wanted to do was to be able to write their name. Kind of makes me want to cry thinking about it. That was very impressive to me that you had to know, you had to know something. They taught themselves to read and they used to read Spanish-language newspapers, and that was very impressive to me. It meant to me that education was important.

In fact, in my old age as I look back on my life, I begin to make sense of the chaos of everyday living, and you see certain trends, you see certain threads, you see certain trajectories in one's whole life, and those trajectories take on value and meaning, and education was one of those for me. So I pursued education. I was a serious student all during the years. Even in fulfilling wild, senseless projects that

teachers would assign for homework, I took them seriously, studied hard with them and went beyond that. I remembered going into the public library to do my studies when I was living in Tyler, Texas, and finding other books that aren't available in the school library and learning all kind of other stuff that was going on or had gone in the world.

So education was important. I followed it, I got my bachelor's, got my master's, I did some doctoral-level studies and other studies as well, and I saw to it that I worked hard so that my children would get their education. Back in the thirties, a high school education was all you needed to survive. Well, it's not true anymore. You have to have advanced education.

Valadez Where did you go to high school?

[00:08:30]

Hernández It was Tyler Senior High School.

Valadez Is that near Victoria?

[00:08:34]

Hernández No, it's East Texas. Way up by—I don't know if you know Kilgore.

Valadez To the north, northeast?

[00:08:42]

Hernández Yeah. It's called the Black Belt because so many Black people lived there. It's called the Pine Belt because there are so many pine trees, oil wells.

Valadez So from high school, that high school, where did you go to college?

[00:08:59]

Hernández Midwestern University, which is in Wichita Falls, Texas.

Another point I wanted to make is something about teachers. I was very lucky, very fortunate that wherever I went, teachers took an interest in me and they would support me and encourage me. In fact, I had one teacher in Tyler—I was dying of malnutrition; we were very poor—and she salvaged me. She arranged with her doctor that I should be treated and get Vitamins B injections and so on, and it saved my life. I would have died. So there's always been teachers involved in my life. I went to the university, there were teachers there who saw, too, that I had scholarships and all kinds of support. So education and then teachers, part of that thread all my life had value, has meaning even for me today, even though I'm not openly involved in all that stuff.

Valadez How about your brothers and sisters? How did they fare?

[00:10:10]

Hernández I have an elder brother, but he died at six months, and I have a picture of him lying on his—from Michoacán. It's fading, the little picture. Then I was born next. My mother used to say I was the spitting image of my older brother, but I had physical problems. I was a "blue" child, had respiratory problem as an infant, and nearly died then. My mother, of course, salvaged me, she took care of me. She saw to it that I wouldn't die. She became a nurse eventually, during the Depression. That's one of the ways she supported the family was through nursing.

Valadez Can you describe a little bit more of your childhood, but especially the time frame that you went from the high school to college and eventually coming to Sacramento? How does that happen?

[00:11:20]

Hernández Well, I got scholarships to go to the university upon graduating from high school in Tyler, and the university was, I don't know, 150 miles away, Wichita Falls. The university's still there. I was a performer, I was a musician, and I wasn't a great talent, but I performed reasonably well and got scholarships for that.

Valadez What did you perform? What did you play?

[00:11:48]

Hernández Piano.

Valadez Oh, the piano. I didn't know that.

[00:11:52]

Hernández I'm classically trained, and that's what got me through for my bachelor's, with all kinds of support from the music faculty. Well, there were other faculty who were interested in me. The English faculty wanted me to major in English. So the experience there was really great because of all the support that I got.

So then on graduating from college, I went immediately into military service, spent two years on active duty and I was stationed at El Paso at Fort Bliss.

Valadez What year was that?

[00:12:34]

Hernández Fifty-six to '58, two years there. Then I did not stay in Texas. I came back to California to be with my maternal family, my mother's family, who was still there, still some people there. By the way, most of my relatives, both sides of the family, don't live here. They live in the interior of Mexico, so I don't see them very often or hear from the either. We've kind of lost touch.

But anyway, I went to Los Angeles in order to be with my family again. By the way, by that time my father had died. He died at age forty-two. It was quite a shock. So I went back to L.A. I struggled there. I did establish a music studio down there, had a very successful music studio with great students there, and put on recitals and performances and all that sort of thing. I came to the attention of professional music teachers. They have big associations, and they eventually invited me to become state chair of what's called the Young Artists Guild. It's really a quite prestigious way of recognizing student talent and presenting it, supporting them, and launching them, if you will, in professional careers if they want that.

About that time, I was also working for L.A. County as a social worker, so I had two jobs, a social worker by day and a musician by night and weekends. Got married and started my family that time. Came to the attention of certain leaders in East L.A. I don't know if the names mean anything, Alicia Escalante, Bob Gandarra [phonetic]. Alicia at one time was national chair of Chicano Welfare Rights, and we met and collaborated a few times down there.

I then went and got my master's—I left this out—in social work at USC and got that in '68. Went to work for L.A. County, soon became first-line supervisor for a child welfare unit in one of the district offices. L.A. County welfare is *huge*. At one time, it was seventy-four district offices, and some of those district offices were *huge*, three and four hundred staff.

Well, I worked in one in Compton and had a number of collaborations with a Mexican American lawyer by the name of John Ortega, who said one time to me,

“There’s something going on at the state level and someone from Sacramento is coming down to talk about it over in East L.A. Let’s go.”

So we went, and there were two young men who were working for state social services there, and they were trying to describe that they were directing a special program and that it was going to come to Los Angeles. They wanted to alert people about that. It wasn’t clear to me what their program was, but, nonetheless, they were there. I can’t remember their names. One of them’s very important in a certain history I’m going to tell you about, but I can’t remember his name.

So, eventually, I was recognized by the director of county welfare down there, and so I was offered and I accepted an appointment. It’s really a high-level administrative job down there, and because I sat in that job, I was sent to a state conference on problems of the Spanish-speaking. That was the name of the conference. It was a two-day conference. So they sent me there, and so I went, but I went prepared. I took with me 250 recommendations out of East L.A. about how to improve services to the Spanish-speaking in terms of public welfare. So when I waved my card—I had them on little cards, 3-by-5 cards, and I had a stack. I waved them at the conference that I had these. It caused a sensation. [laughs]

So the state then recruited me to come to Sacramento, and I accepted that. The young men who came down to L.A. to talk about the project, they got themselves fired because they participated in a public demonstration down in San Diego, and the state department took a dim view of that and fired them. It was kind of unfair, but, nonetheless, fired them. And so I ended up in their job, which was to develop this special project, and the project was to find the ways—these are the words—to find

the ways and means for increasing the presence of Mexican Americans in state and county welfare systems.

So I did that for one year. I did studies, I traveled like crazy all over the state, not only meeting with public welfare people and members of county boards of supervisors, but meeting with Latino leadership in a variety of counties. I did that for a year.

Then after a year, I was ready and I developed a plan for how to go about doing the recruitment. I had eight counties lined up who wanted it, and the first county who signed was in San Diego. One of the pictures I wanted to show you was a wonderful little photograph taken of the chairman of the board, a Mexican who headed up a countywide program or services, and me. It was used to publicize the fact that the county had signed this contract with my project to start increasing Mexican Americans in service.

As I said, then I had seven other countries who knew about this program and wanted it. They were ready to sign as well. So the second country who was about to sign was San Bernardino, and I went down there for the day of the signing, and something strange happened. I saw the county welfare director and the county exec go into the supervisor's chamber, and they looked over at me and I knew something was wrong, because I was standing way over there. Pretty soon, some of the staff came and took me off to a room and just engaged me in a conversation. I knew something was up. It was bad news.

Well, that morning, the county exec called the State Department of Social Welfare and talked to my boss and said that I was down there and they were about to

sign a contract, and he was trying to confirm that everything was on the up-and-up. So my boss said, “Well, we’re looking for ways to close that program down.”

[laughs] Talk about a betrayal. God, I just couldn’t believe it.

So I get back to Sacramento, and on my desk was a one-line memo—I’ll never forget it—quote, “Effective immediately, your travel is restricted to Sacramento County only,” unquote. Well, I resigned. Soon after that, I resigned, and I was really upset about this for personal reasons, and that is I had my family here and I didn’t have a job.

So I went to the campus and talked with the dean of social work, is my field, and submitted my *curriculum vitae* and went in for an interview. It was Jesse McClure. I don’t know if you knew him.

Valadez Yes.

[00:22:21]

Hernández African American, young guy, activist, was appointed dean, amazing. Went in to see him, he was there as I sat there, and he was looking at my *vitae* and he didn’t seem very impressed or interested. Finally, I said, “Is that my *curriculum vitae* you’re looking at?”

And he said, “Yes.”

And I said, “I don’t think that’s my *vitae*. Do you mind if I see it?” So he handed it to me, and I said, “This is not the *vitae* that I submitted to your office. This is a *vitae* that was used years ago when I worked for L.A. County seeking a promotion in that department down there. It’s not what I submitted to you. But I see

my *vitae* in that stack you have over there.” It was a tall stack. “May I get it out, please?”

He says, “Of course.”

So I pulled it out and I handed it to him, and he opens it up and he’s studying it. He closes it up, he goes over and closes the door, he brings the chair up close to me and hires me right on the spot. [laughs]

Valadez All right!

[00:23:28]

Hernández Now, how the other *vitae* got in there, I have no idea. But anyway, that’s how I got hired at Sac State.

Valadez That was about seventy—

[00:23:42]

Hernández Seventy-two, because I’d been working with the state. So that assured I could feed my family.

Valadez It’s interesting how things happen that way. But you got there with all of the experience and the information that you had been gathering throughout all the time that you were up and down the state—

[00:24:15]

Hernández That’s right.

Valadez —on how to improve services. Was [Edward] Casavantes already there?

[00:24:20]

Hernández Casavantes came later. Oh, that's another story. Had he not died—and he did die of a broken heart.

Valadez Yeah, he did. He trusted the system too. He trusted that he could get a get a good hearing on his case.

[00:24:47]

Hernández He didn't. He did not.

Valadez He also got betrayed, seems like.

[00:24:50]

Hernández Yes. He did not. I went with him to San Francisco to the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity, and we filed a complaint against the university. I cosigned the complaint with him. I was already established. It wasn't a complaint about me; it was for him. But I was trying to bolster his complaint and to back him up. Had his lawsuit succeeded, talk about a revolution in higher education, that would have been it. It would have blown open all the corruption that exists around personnel management in university life, and you know it *is* a corrupt system, okay?

Now, all the federal compliance agencies, when they heard about his complaint, they sided in. They were in. They bought in. They were going to force them—they were going to crack the university, because it's a *huge* national problem. It's not just here, a national problem of the way universities manage people and evaluate people and retain them and all this sort of thing.

But Casavantes' family grew tired of the lawsuit, even though they had one success after another. But getting to the main issue was never achieved, because they pulled out. I said nothing about it. It's their right, I guess, but they did leave me high

and dry because my name was involved in that. But anyway, that would have opened up the university, would have changed university life completely. I fret about that to this day.

Valadez We had meetings with him and we wanted to come in and be a part of the support, but he felt that he didn't need that, that he had the law on his side—
[00:27:11]

Hernández He did.

Valadez —and he could trust the law, and he would always tell us, “You have to trust the system. It's there and it's got complications, but you can argue your case in a higher court and you can get justice.” And I was really blown away, because we were all kind of facing similar kind of issues in our hiring and our tenure and all of that. I just felt really broken by his demise, his unwillingness to bring in the muscle, and lose it the way he did.

[00:27:54]

Hernández But he had all the federal compliance agencies with him. He would have won. There's no doubt about it. He would have won, but he died. That was very unfortunate. And then the family wouldn't support it after that.

[00:28:03]

Valadez The Chicano Movement had a lot of activities going on back in '65, '66, '67, but in '68, the Mexican American Education Project was doing something like what you were doing with reference to social work. They were meeting to explore the high failure of children in elementary school or in school and the reasons why all of that was going on. That's when we came in. So Steve Arvizu became

director of the program and we shifted the paradigm. We insisted on looking not at the deficits in the deficit theory kind of modality, but rather to look at all the positiveness of culture, so we explored culture, developed culture. Anthropology is about culture, so culture became one of the main frames for structuring another kind of education. For those participants and many students that got involved, culture therefore became a means for understanding what needed to happen and how the Movement needed to go. Did culture figure something like that for you?

[00:29:33]

Hernández In education? Or how do you mean that?

Valadez In social work.

[00:29:38]

Hernández Yes, but it took on a slightly different tone, because we weren't working with an exclusive group. We weren't simply educating for Mexicans and Mexican Americans. We had to accommodate all the groups, including non-minority groups. So culture then was discussed on a broader framework.

We developed a curriculum, by the way, a two-year graduate curriculum. We called it the poverty and minorities concentration, *very* powerful. In fact, one accrediting SAT [phonetic] review team said that was the centerpiece of the curriculum. The next year it was gone. [laughs] Nonetheless, we did develop a two-year graduate—that's *powerful*. We never got credit for it, but we did it.

We also had a special two-semester course that all students had to take around cultural concerns and poverty concerns, equality, that sort of thing, that sort of content, and that that was powerful. Now, we did that, and, no, I don't think any other

academic program in the nation had one like that. Talk about historic, that was historic.

Now I'm going to brag. I don't like to brag, but I'm going to here. I researched that on how to put it together. The curriculum had to be unassailable, because soon as you make such a proposal, you get critique, it gets torn apart, other academic units would butt in [laughs] and criticize it and try to tear it apart. So we had to develop a framework that they could not attack, absolutely could not attack, and I did that. In case anyone's interested, it has to do with how to integrate system theory, the latest in science theory with quantum theory and all that, existential content, humanist content, and phenomenology, how to bring all of that together in support of culture, cultural development, cultural identity and to that for all the cultures that would be present in the classroom.

Valadez You had that as a concept paper?

[00:32:41]

Hernández Theoretical framework. And also I developed a course on it and all students had to take it, first-semester graduate course. So that was very powerful. And, by the way, it was unassailable. There was no way you could criticize it, *no way*. So we survived. Had we done something very specific to a cultural group, we would have been torn apart in a minute and we wouldn't have survived. So I'm very proud of that, very proud. I'm sorry to say that a year after it was cited as a centerpiece of the curriculum, that curriculum was gone. Isn't that interesting? You want to know who destroyed it, who led it? An African American and a Latina. And

at that time, I had my own civil rights lawsuit with the university, so I had to let it go. I couldn't defend it.

Valadez That might be something that would be good to submit on behalf of you, your papers, your work, whatever, to the university when that time comes. We're looking to see what content or concepts have been developed by faculty and encouraging them to consider putting together, like, the papers, you know, the Juan Hernández concept papers, whatever, and submit those to the university so they become part of the archival record of intellectual things that you worked on, developed, structured, and that maybe another time in the future some Latino/Chicano group may be able to pick it up and work with it and move it forward again so that the ideas don't get lost. That would be fantastic.

[00:34:40]

Hernández I mentioned a little book. I don't know, did you see it in Spanish? I gave it you in Spanish.

Valadez Yes. Let's show it so that the camera will pick it up. *La Mujer Indigena del Cuarto Mundo*, very excellent. *Símbolo de Sexto Sol*.

[00:35:08]

Hernández Yes. I think it's superb. [laughs] And then here's the English version.

Valadez *Fourth World Indigenous Women*.

[00:35:18]

Hernández Arthritis is setting in. [laughs] You see this emblem right here? I adopted that as mine, and it represents mostly education, the authentic life that includes, very powerfully, education. I want to revise this little book. There's a few

things that got in here that I never could correct. There's an important omission that just got—I don't know how it was omitted, but it was omitted and I need to correct.

And also one of my criticisms is about education, that the mission of education is to assist students to become authentic people. So I wanted to add the curriculum. I was critical of social work because graduate education is given away as a way of trying to recruit students. But I did I want to include the curriculum that we had developed that this supported, these very ideas supported. Even though we didn't use that language in developing the theoretical frame, that's exactly what we supported, what we looked for and found in these other theories, this content. The course that I developed, I wanted to include that, too, as an example. It might be just an addendum or something, but, nonetheless, to include it. So I'm looking for a new publisher.

Valadez Well, good, good. I wish you luck in that. There's a lot of publishing houses out there now that are moving these kinds of materials and concepts, so that's good.

What first attracted you to the Chicano Movement? What would you say are in your memories, events, people, things that you heard, saw?

[00:37:21]

Hernández Well, I think all these things that I mentioned regarding my early family and my relationship to my various family members, especially my grandparents, were contributing factors to my identifying with the with the social movement—I don't like that term—with the Movement. So that when Cesar Chavez came on the scene, I was just a lowly social worker working in Los Angeles when he

made the headlines with his effort to organize the farm worker and to call for certain boycotts.

I remember in this big office where I worked, it was open like a warehouse and we had all our desks. Must have been three or four hundred people in there. And when the news hit, someone brought in a radio and turned it on so we could listen to the news reports about it. That was very important because I was drawn to it immediately to want to support it morally, if no other way. So I did follow that for most of the—I got to meet him once at a small conference.

I was involved, as I mentioned, with Alicia Escalante when she was active in East L.A. She was most powerful, and when she spoke publicly, I mean, you listened to her. She was impressive. I learned a lot from her, so that drew me to a movement really for justice.

Then when I came to Sacramento, I met a lot people who were involved. I'd like to name a few. There's Marta Bustamante, little Angie Avila [phonetic], who's here. She used to be in San Diego. There's Carolina Flores [phonetic] now; Mario Olivero [phonetic]; Frank Vazquez [phonetic], who was an attorney; Pablo Sanchez [phonetic], who used to be with San Jose many long years ago; Dora Perez [phonetic], Hank Castro [phonetic], who was with the *pintos*; Steve Arvizu, very important. There's John Martinez [phonetic], a lawyer; John Ortega [phonetic], another lawyer. Pat Holl [phonetic]. Do you know Pat Holl? She used to be principal of Washington Elementary School, the first national Hispanic national school. Valdemar Gonzalez; Andres Rindon; Jesse McClure. I mentioned Edward Casavantes. I've got to say these names. They're very important.

Valadez For sure.

[00:40:24]

Hernández And, of course, I think I've already mentioned Alicia Escalante and Bob Gandarra.

Valadez Carolina Flores was there?

[00:40:41]

Hernández Well, I met her. It was later that I met her through the Latina Social Network, where she became state leader in that and locally too. We put on three statewide conferences that we were involved in. I mean, the LSWN was a statewide thing. So conferences were going on all over the state, but we put on three really beautiful conferences and she was involved in that, and she's still active here. In fact, I had hoped that she would run for public office, because she has the guts to be able to do that.

Valadez Oh, yeah. I see her name always on those emails on Facebook.

[00:41:23]

Hernández Yes. She keeps sending them.

Valadez How about the Civil Rights Movement? That was going on. Were you consciously aware that there were these larger movements going on?

[00:41:36]

Hernández Oh, yeah. Oh, sure. I mentioned in the beginning how when you get to be old, you start looking at your life and you see it, you see it in its entirety. It's different from seeing it up to this point or up to this point, but you see the whole

thing, and that's when you attach value and meaning. So, yes, I was involved, much aware of the Civil Rights Movement and identifying with it.

I think what opened me, makes me open for that is this whole idea of looking for justice. I have an appreciation that our system in the United States is not a system for justice. In fact, it denies it. I remember studying the Federalist papers and there was this argument about whether we would establish a nation organized around the body politic or a political economy. That's what the big argument was. Body politic would support states' rights. That's a negative attached to that. They went to the political economy because it gave people freedom to amass money, to go that way, and, in fact, in the vernacular, political economy goes like this: those with the power get the resources. And that's what we've got.

So when we have this kind of inequitable system, there is no justice. Justice is torn apart. And that's the sacrifice that was made when the founding fathers decided to codify all that in the Constitution, was try to save the South, to keep it in, keep the nation together because were facing a civil war. So it was an accommodation. But, nonetheless, that's what we've got.

When you study the ancient people from Greece, the ancient indigenous thinkers, they talked about justice. Plato talked about it, Socrates talked about justice, and they said that justice involves freedom and justice involves equality, and you can't have justice if you take any one of those out. It's freedom and equality that then makes justice possible. So what we've got is freedom and equality if you can gain it, you know. If you're willing to fight for it and get something, then you've got some

measure of equality. And I think that's what all the movements are. It's about equality, trying to elevate it in the culture.

Valadez Yes, it's the struggle for it.

[00:44:19]

Hernández So the trajectory, then, around education also involves involvement around justice issues, and in my discussions with people, I reject the idea of refining the concept down. Like social workers will say, "Well, our concern is with social justice, survival justice." No, that's not it. That'll get you nowhere." The concern should be around *justice*, not just a piece of it. You either have it or you don't. And we don't.

I don't know, did I get to the point? I don't know. [laughs]

Valadez Yes, you did, you did.

How did you see the role of Chicanas in the Movement?

[00:45:11]

Hernández Chicanas?

Valadez Women, young women getting involved in the process.

[00:45:15]

Hernández Very much. I mentioned Alicia Escalante, I mentioned Marta Bustamante. In fact, there's a lot of women on my list of people who are important to me and my experience, and that is tied to a family experience in which my grandmother, even though she had eleven children, she was tied down that way, she was a powerful personality. And my own mother, powerful personality. My sister,

powerful. My wife, powerful personality. I'm attracted to that, actually. [laughs] So I appreciate and want to participate with women in the Movement, and I have.

Valadez This next question, you've answered it in diverse ways, but it's the one that asks about your role and contribution to the Movimiento Chicano, but it's really asking what did you do, what do you feel that you were successful in fighting for, initiating, helping others initiate, to create? Can you recap on some of those things that you've done?

[00:46:43]

Hernández I'll mention one. I'll go back to the Young Artists Guild. It's outside of the Justice Movement, but it was important when I got named chair, state chair of that little Young Artists Guild program, because it had symbolic value, and even though I moved away from L.A. and came up here and got involved here in Sacramento, was no longer involved in that world, I worked to make sure my name stayed in the history document. It's important.

Valadez Yes, it is.

[00:47:16]

Hernández *I'm* not important, nobody knows me, but it's important to see that Spanish surname there. And what did I contribute here? Well, when I worked for the state, I developed that program which is historic, actually. I keep saying that. It's historic. Too bad it didn't last, but it was historic. And the fact that we had eight counties lined up who wanted it, that's powerful. I'm sorry that the Reagan administration decided to destroy it off, but, nonetheless, it got created.

Then when I came here to the university, I got involved with developing the special graduate curriculum. Again, historic, a special course that all students had to take. It was a two-semester course. Then my own course that sets out a theoretical framework that supports development of cultural identity for all people, that was a contribution. I also got involved with the *pintos* and developed a special program for them on this campus, had to overcome the fears of top management who were afraid to have parolees on campus, even though they were already here. I had to overcome that, to see the parolees as organized on campus.

Valadez Develop that a little but more, please. What was that program, the Pinto Program?

[00:48:53]

Hernández It was called Project Excelsior, and Hank Castro was involved. In fact, there were three Castros involved, Hank—I can't remember the other two first names. There were two other Castros. Now, they were *brilliant*, absolutely brilliant. I was impressed. I guess prison life really magnifies human behavior. They really gain a great understanding of human behavior, so they could read situations beautifully. And everywhere I went, I took them with me, mainly Hank with me. If I met with the admissions director, Hank was there. If I met with the president, Hank was there so he could see the process and participate in it, and they could see him and not fear him as a criminal or ex-criminal. So that's how we overcame the resistance and got it established. I wrote their program. I helped them to conceptualize it and get it down on paper, and then we pursued funding for it. We mainly got federal funding for it. We did that for eleven years.

Valadez What did it involve?

[00:50:17]

Hernández There was the campus program, because we had an off-campus program too. The campus program was a way of collecting parolees who were on campus and giving them an opportunity to vent on any issues they had and what they confronted while on campus, and assist them to overcome that in a constructive way, not a destructive way. We would offer educational supports for those who were having academic problems in the classroom. That was the major thrust of it all. There was counseling available for those who might need it as well.

Then we noticed that the student also needed jobs, because there is stigma attached. Did you know that in California there are 250 jobs that an ex-con cannot get in California? So employment's a problem for them. So we established a Community Resource Project, and it was intended to assist *pintos* or *ex-pintos* to get trained and find employment out in the community.

Valadez Like a halfway house?

[00:51:44]

Hernández It wasn't a house. It was just a program. We had staff who would assist them and so on. We did that for eleven years. I think Community Resource still exists, or did for many years after I got out of it. I don't know what they did. I wasn't involved with them after that. But it lasted for eleven years. It was, I thought, very successful, very.

Valadez I came back in '74 from my graduate work and I remember going to Folsom. I think Frank Covina [phonetic] was involved in offering the class, and we

would ride with him to participate and to see what was going on, the success of the program, very, very good program.

[00:52:37]

Hernández Yeah. Well, that wasn't part of our program but, nonetheless, what he did was a good job.

Valadez He was doing that. But I had heard a lot about the Pinto Program when I came back, so it was like something that had been initiated, obviously, and been made to realize something good. Something else? Contributions, programs initiated?

[00:53:06]

Hernández Should I look at my notes?

Valadez Sure. A number of students graduated.

[00:53:14]

Hernández No, I think that is it. Also within social work—and I was involved in the process—we increased the presence of faculty of color. At the height of that presence, we had sixteen faculty of color in a total faculty of forty-four. That's impressive, plus some part-timers.

Towards the end of my tenure, we got involved in campus-wide debates on affirmative action. There was a strong resistance to it, even though it has been around for years and years and years. And we won the debate. It was *fascinating*. It was an education for me, and I had an appreciation of what it means to try to survive in our institutions. The resistance has to be fought. You can't just lie down and let it beat you up. You have to fight it. And in the case of the affirmative action debates, we had to outmaneuver those who were going to resist us. And I would see them, the

resistance, sitting together and laughing and carrying on, putting on a show that they this down, and then to see them after they saw what we had organized for them.

[laughs]

We had Academic Senate debates, standing-room only, and my little committee organized that. We got people to come in. A lot of women came in on that one. So as the debate continued, the women came forward and started arguing. “What is what is the problem here ?” And blah, blah, blah. And they couldn’t respond, really. The other side could not really respond.

What was appalling to me, though, was that some faculty of color who were present and sat on the fence, they would neither support affirmative action nor criticize it, but they were sitting on the fence. They wanted to see the outcome of the debate, and if it was going to lose, they were certainly not going to speak up for affirmative action. If they won, then they’d speak up. And that’s exactly what they did. It was appalling. So that was one.

But, now, what was the consequence personally? That is that the other leadership, the other side, began to respect me, where before, they just kind of laughed me off. They respected. What did they respect? That I found out how they played their game and I played and played it well. They liked that. Not many do that.

Valadez You did your homework. You were ready.

[00:56:24]

Hernández That sounds crass, doesn’t it?

Valadez What’s that?

[00:56:31]

Hernández What I just said. [laughter]

Valadez No, it doesn't. No, it doesn't. What's true is true. If you do your homework, if you're ready, they have no way to go around you. They always underscore you, they always think that they understand you. They know how to manipulate. When you no longer have those little strings of a puppet that they can manipulate, they don't know how to control you. It scares them.

[00:56:59]

Hernández Yeah, and then they'll accept you then.

Valadez The question says, did the Movimiento Chicano raise your consciousness along social, cultural, and/or political lines, or all three?

[00:57:14]

Hernández Oh, yes, all those ways, yes, certainly, positively. Without having the knowledge that there was a movement, that there were other people involved and concerned about the same things, I maybe would not have participated openly. So it bolsters one up, it gives one courage to speak up and to participate, knowing that there are many others involved.

When I used to work for the state, although the project was a very small one, the Mexican American Project, a very small little activity, it was high stakes, high stakes. That's why they destroyed it, because it was a high-stakes program. But the feelings were so intense that I didn't know whether I was going to actually survive. When I would leave my house in the morning, I would open the door and I would scan the steps to make sure there weren't any trip wires. Isn't that something?

Valadez Yes, I understand that.

[00:58:26]

Hernández There is one more thing. This is truly big. When I worked for the state and collected all that information, at the same time that I was organizing all that information, in the news were little articles in the [*Sacramento*] *Bee* about a small group of Mexican public welfare recipients in Santa Rosa. They called themselves Mixta Progresista, a little group, and they filed a complaint against that county on the issue of the unequal provision of services to the Spanish-speaking. That's how the lawyers finally sorted out the language. They couldn't communicate with workers, so they didn't get service, and the workers had attitudes that they didn't care about anyway.

So they filed a complaint. That became a lawsuit, but it just sat there for, I don't know, many, many months, and every once in a while the *Bee* would report on them trying to get essential data out of the state about their concern. And the state would hem and haw and drag its feet, said they didn't have the data, they had no way to collect the data to see if there were Spanish-speaking staff, and on and on and on.

And I'm saying, "Why is my boss saying this? Here I am, I spent a year collecting all this information. If *he* doesn't have it over there, *I've* got it right here."

Well, when they killed my program, I pulled that information together and I went to San Francisco to the MALDEF office there, and it happened that Mario Olivero was there, and the lawyer I was talking to, I said I had all this data. Went in to see Mario, and Mario comes out, he wants to see this person with all this data.

[laughs] We go over it all. That, by the way, begins my relationship with Mario Olivero that lasts until his death.

So I turn that information over to him, and his lawyers there formulated it into an affidavit which I signed, and which was attached to a lawsuit brought by MELDEF and public advocates in the California Rural Legal Assistance group, to take the lawsuit out of—I guess that's Sonoma County, and make it a national litigation case. And they did that, and I was very proud to have that affidavit bearing my name attached to that. It made it possible for the case to be litigated at the national federal, federal district court. The case was settled. It took, I don't know, five years. It was settled by the time I came here, in which the Offices for Civil Rights were established in state and county service nationally. It had to happen all over. Mario Olivero then used that office to locate and recruit Latinos into state service. I don't know if you remember this, but he hired in or saw to it that 214 Mexican Americans got hired in state service.

Valadez Would that be the beginning of CAFE?

[01:02:16]

Hernández No, CAFE was already there. They were already there. The settlement of that lawsuit established in that office, those Offices of Civil Rights became the means to which to identify and then recruit Latino talent, and he did that, 214 all in one year or something. *Colossal* institutional change. Once there, once they get past their probation, they're there. It's part of state service now. That was, what, mid-seventies or something when that was settled. So that was an historic event, and I'm proud to say, *very* proud to say that I played a role in it. I certainly didn't litigate it, but I played a role in it.

Valadez You played a fantastic role. Would you say that the Chicano Movement had an impact on life here in Sacramento? I guess the continuation would be as compared to how the Movement took place up and down California or Southwest.

[01:03:39]

Hernández There are consequences, I think, for all that activity back in the past. I don't know about activity right now. I don't. I think one of your questions was, was I was dissatisfied with any parts of the Movement. It's what I see now, and that is apathy, disinterest. We don't have speakers who will come out and talk about issues. I'm sure they're acting on them, but they don't talk about them so it affects larger populations. They are leaders, in other words, but not acting like leaders, anyway.

There was one Latino representative at the federal level who was a guest on [*Real Time with*] *Bill Maher*, and Bill Maher brought in that day [Ann] Coulter. I can't remember her first name. You know Coulter?

Valadez I remember the name.

[01:04:37]

Hernández Thin woman with long blonde hair. She's a mouthpiece against anything that's not Republican, not *extremely* conservative. She was trying to refine this thing about the immigrant question, and she has come up with this new concept about it. This representative—I wish I could remember his name—spoke up. He says, “You don't have to worry about the illegal immigrants. You have to worry about the Latinos who are already here. There's 50 million of them and they're concerned about immigration and what you would say about immigration, because they have all kinds

of relatives and friends who are in that category that you are demeaning. So you have to worry about those 50 million, and if you continue with this kind of approach, this kind of language, you have no hope of ever regaining the White House.” [laughter] I thought that was powerful. Where’s he been? He was great. So there are consequences.

Valadez Sure. In the early years, the first fifteen years of the Movement, a lot of activity was going on, and I think the transformation then, what we began to see in Sacramento was uniquely different, but after these many years, forty-five, forty-six, forty-seven years since 1968 when the biggest push took place, Cesar came up, [Rodolfo] “Corky” Gonzales was doing his thing, Reies Tijerina was doing his thing, [unclear] was doing his, educators were doing things, there’s a lot of activity, it can’t help but transform the city in some ways, but you’re right that years later, forty-five years later, you look at the city and you see things kind of slowing down or slowed down, and not the kind of political activity as once upon a time used to take place. You’re right. So the question that comes up is, what are those unresolved issues that are still confronting us? What do you see is maybe the biggest issue, maybe second biggest, whatever? There’s many things that need to be done in the Chicano community that’s needing something to take place. What would you say is the biggest unresolved issues that we are facing today?

[01:07:34]

Hernández I tried to make a few notes about that, but as I sit here and I look at the list, there’s something else. It’s a huge issue for the nation that involves always having to have a scapegoat group, always have to have some group that we demean

and humiliate and put down, and it's really come to a head now where it's not something that only a few would recognize through coded language, it's something that's open. With the marriage equality activity, it indicates that that group as scapegoats has less chance of being a scapegoat as a result, although there are still other things attached to it that make it difficult for the group, but it's one last group that is the outcast. The illegals, they're outcasts. We've always got at someone. So I think that's a huge issue for us to get rid of that. We don't need to be scapegoating people, just don't need it. There must be other ways to win elections.

Valadez That's true.

[01:09:24]

Hernández Anyway, so I'm going to that to my list. I listed education. In the heyday of affirmative action with education, the institution responded by establishing these programs that tried to identify those who had a hard time in education and may not have the right scores or enough credentials earned as students to get in. So they had little programs to try to support some of them, and that's a worthwhile thing to do, but they completely ignored all those students of color who were fully qualified to be admitted. They just ignored them.

I remember when I was active with that very issue back in the seventies, 16 percent of graduating seniors were fully qualified Mexican American students for admission to university. They didn't bother with them. I felt they should go after them. I mean, we have the other, the affirmative action type, that's good, that's a right and proper thing to do, but they need to go after them too. So I thought that was something that needed to be done.

I used to collect information about this system of education that we're in, and the official reports from the Chancellor's Office and from allied agencies all pointed to the fact that there were great gains made for African Americans, for women, for Asians, and Native Americans. Of course you know if you have one Native American, you've got it made.[laughter] Well, the only women they reported about relative to Mexicans were Hispanic women, Latinas. They'd report on that because they showed a little increase, but they never mention Latinos, never mentioned them. And I would try to find that information. They never mentioned it because we were grossly underrepresented. So even though we had a few increases from women, it still pulled down the group.

So I developed reports for the system. I tried to organize a political group to support it through the legislature. None of it worked. They would lend their names, but they weren't really interested in it, and Latino groups weren't interested in it either, for some reason. I thought that was strange. So it died, but I do have the old documents. I used to make projections that if we continued at the same rate, that it would be, I don't know, the year 2544 before parity would be achieved for Latinos. They don't care. They don't care and don't seem to still care.

But anyway, education is a big one. It's the tool by which we rise out of poverty and we can make it in the system. I think we need to pursue equality, we need to continue to do that, but we need to do that in terms of that we will never have justice if we don't have equality. Justice cannot be achieved without it. As a group, we need to work on behalf of other people, not on behalf of ourselves. We find with this latest emergence of a Latino population that's truly important now, we see all

kinds of little groups popping up to want to take the limelight on certain things, you know, mainly through the Internet, trying to get the blogs and those whatever you call them, Facebook things, but that's about the individual, really. In fact, some are becoming quite prominent that I know personally, who very often, maybe through no faults of their own, blotched, ruined, different activity in the Movement.

I mentioned justice. What does all that mean? It means you have to be vigilant, really vigilant. But how are we if the group as a group are kind of apathetic? It's disturbing.

Valadez Yes.

[01:14:20]

Hernández I think that the term *Chicano* had great power, had great power in the past. I think it's lost some of that power. We need to find another word. In terms of my work with our statewide conferences and elsewhere other places, the diversity is such now it's so big, involves so many people, that we've got to find a language that includes them.

I remember one of the statewide conferences we put on, I was trying to advance an award that we would give out annually, and I used some of the metaphors that I used for Arciniega's investiture, and it didn't fly with the group because there was diversity there of Latinos from Central America and South America, and the Caribbean, and it didn't fly. So I tried to modify the language. They accepted it, but not with great support. So we've got to find some new language by which to be inclusive and not even suggest exclusivity.

Now, some of the great leaders, I'm thinking of—is it Betita Martínez from the Bay Area, very strong about using the word *Chicano*, and she won't talk to you if you don't identify as a Chicano. [laughs] My daughter worked for a minority magazine over in the Bay Area and they asked her to go interview Betita. The first thing that came from Betita's mouth was, "How do you identify? Are you a Chicana?"

And she said, "Yes, I'm a Chicana."

She says "Good. We can talk." Otherwise, she was going to dismiss her. [laughs] I appreciate that, but it turns off a lot of people.

Valadez Yes, it does, it does.

In the early days of the Chicano Movement, the term identified a level of consciousness that said if you don't focus on the group that you are trying to speak for, your issues are going to get so generalized because they vary from group to group, so if you talk about Chicano issues in California and you're trying to bring in a group of *cubanos* or *puertorriqueños* who don't relate to what you are saying, then they will argue against you and they will say, "Well, that's not an important issue for us." So to be inclusive sort of borders on, like, disaster for your project or what you're arguing for because other people do not value those issues. They don't feel that those issues are important to them.

[01:17:41]

Hernández Yes, right.

Valadez When we were talking about having bilingual people in social work, I was part of an interviewing team asking these number of candidates about their

awareness of Chicano issues. A lot of them had no familiarity to Chicano issues in California because they were from El Salvador or they were from Nicaragua or they were from Venezuela or *chilenos*, and they spoke Spanish and they had an understanding of culture, Chilean culture, but they had absolutely no comprehension of the Mexican American experience or Chicano experience and therefore couldn't relate to those people. When they had to go out to talk to them, they came to them to all of their attitudes of superiority because they don't understand the Mexican American experience. So how do you work that out? How do you stay true to the focus that you want to have, while at the same time trying to gain the support of other people? What's the equalizer there? What are your thoughts on that?

[01:19:04]

Hernández In terms of activism, I think it would be, "I'll support you on your issue. I'll participate with you to get what you need, what you want." I'd be like the godfather, I guess. "I'll do this for you, but sometime in the future I may need your help to pursue an issue about my group. So we can collaborate in those ways, and you don't have to give up anything and neither do I or my group."

Valadez But that is true, it's that sense of collaboration, that sense of the issues of justice may be defined differently for our individual cultural context, but we have a struggle that unifies us. So you help me, I can help you, and together we're stronger than individually arguing semantics and terms and things like that.

[01:20:14]

Hernández Exactly. Very good, yeah.

Valadez That would be an issue there. Many Chicanos have passed on, many activists have passed on, let me say it that way. What are some of the people that you remember that it would be good to honor by mentioning their names as people that said something, did something, were part of something that you believe was important?

[01:20:43]

Hernández Well, I did mention some names and I think *all* of them are important, but the name that really stands out for me, Marta Bustamante. Do you know her?

Valadez Yes.

[01:20:58]

Hernández I'm sure you did. [laughter] I thought she was outstanding.

Valadez Yes.

[01:21:03]

Hernández José Montoya said at her funeral that his group would not have been able to achieve as much as they did without her. So I have upmost admiration for her. So that's a name.

Mario Olivero, he made huge contribution to institutional change not only in this state, but nationally. Very important.

And, you know, there's a monsignor whose name I cannot recall, but who was instrumental with the old Bishops Committee back in the sixties, who established the old Mexican American Project for the State Department of Social Welfare.

Valadez Was that Father Kenny [phonetic]?

[01:22:02]

Hernández No, this was a monsignor out of Sonoma County somewhere, and I knew him, I collaborated with him, but for the life of me, I can't bring his name back. I mentioned how being old, you can see your life, all of it, and you can attach value and meaning to it, you make sense of it, but there's a price you pay.

Valadez Yes.

[01:22:30]

Hernández Memory fades, facts just don't come back anymore. So that's the value of your project here, I think that superb, because we're going to lose it.

Valadez Yes, we are. Is there anything else that you have thought about in preparation for this interview, anything that speaks to the experience that you had from the time you grew up, becoming conscious of things the way they were, not as the way that they ought to be, and now at the end of a very long trajectory, academic and social, political, cultural, are there some thoughts, some ideas that you can leave us with as we come to the closure of our interview?

[01:23:33]

Hernández I think that the events we're seeing now in terms of—it's like a revolution that's taking place in African American communities, especially relative to police relations. It's amazing. You always suspected these things went on, but now you're seeing it. It actually *does* go on. That's not the only event that's taking place. Gays, they're bringing theirs forward. And we need to continue to bring ours forward, but who's going to be the speaker or speakers? I don't know. We have a *lot* of elected officials now. I'm so glad to see so many legislators here in California who are being

very active on different things, but who speaks on the issues that affect us? I don't see it.

Now, I know—I got this from Alicia Escalante, who led public demonstrations, by the way, and organized them, but who said she hated it. She didn't want to be out acting like a clown out on the streets. That wasn't the way to do things, but if you have to, you have to.

But anyway, it's getting to be so widespread now, maybe we're at the cusp of a revolution of some sort that's taking place. You see the candidates for the President of the United States? I think of them as a bunch of clowns. I know why they do this and why they start early, is so that every day you get a news bite about Obama. [laughs] More than anything else, that's what they're doing. But they fan the flames of group hatred. It's very bad and we can't get around it anymore. We used to silence it, but not anymore.

I don't want to end on a negative.

Valadez What is this award that you got?

[01:26:16]

Hernández Steve Arvizu invited me to the investiture. He was involved in organizing that, and he was trying to establish the Monterey campus. He was involved with that, I think at that time.

Valadez Yes.

[01:26:35]

Hernández And I knew Steve from when he was here. In fact, in my various papers I wrote, I always quoted him from his papers that he wrote on culture. So he

invited me to go there, and so I went to the president and I said, “How about sending me down there?” Well, they wouldn’t get me per diem, but he did get me a state car, so I went down. I was very very proud to go down there. I was the only delegate there from this campus, so I named myself that, “Delegate, CSUS.” [laughs]

So I researched this thing and wrote it up to present to Arciniega. I didn’t know how I would get to do it. So I went there, went to the investiture with robes and all that, and then that evening they had a big reception, a big party for him at somebody’s estate, a beautiful house, huge grounds, and they had food, drink, and music and carrying-on.

Arvizu chaired it, and he then called upon me because I told him I had this. He said, “I’ll call on you to read it.” So he called on me, so I got up to speak. Now, when you’re at these parties, big like this, you have groups all over the place, they’re all talking loud, and so to get their attention is very difficult, right? People speaking, they’re just going on babbling with their own parties, not paying attention while I spoke.

The way it starts out captured the people’s imagination there, and the group just went silent. So I presented this thing and read it. I’ll just read it. Could I read just a little bit? I won’t read the whole thing. It’s too long.

So I called it “The Floricanto on the Investiture of Tomas Arciniegas, President, California State College, Bakersfield.” This was back in ’84. Here’s the quote, the starting of it, “As a member of the California State University, you are a part of an educational history reaching back through England, Spain, Germany, and

Italy to Ancient Greece and its distinguished academe, whose thought addresses still the intellectual development of people everywhere.”

So it started getting quiet. I said, “On the occasion of your investiture as president of California State College, Bakersfield, your ascendancy marks an historic moment of great value to all the people of California, but especially to Hispanics, for this celebration enlivens another extraordinary educational tradition of the intellectual evolution of an indigenous people of whom you are a part, reaching back through the Olmecs, the Toltecs, and all who wondered from Aztlán to the glorious Calmecac and its teachings so perfect that they yet repose in the spirits of the cultural inheritors.”

I then had them, okay? And then I bestowed upon him titles at the end. [laughs] I’m very arrogant. [laughter] And it was a huge success. So it got published and I saw to it that Arciniega got a copy. I’m very proud of it.

Valadez So turn it turn it around this way so that the camera can zero in on it, and we’ll take a photo of it and make sure that it’s included in your work.

I want to thank you for your participation in this oral project. I think it’s an honor for us to have somebody who has had the experiences that you have had from the time you were very young to this point in your life when you are retired and you’re asked to come back and to share from the many accolades I’m sure that have been bestowed on you along the way. We are especially happy to have that history because that history will become archived at Sacramento State University and it’ll be available for many, many generations to come, that “*Si se puede*,” you know, you can accomplish a lot of things if you’re willing to put in the struggle that justice requires. You cannot get justice by doing nothing. You have to get involved in the process. We

thank you for your participation in that whole struggle and coming in here today and sharing it with us.

Hernández Senon, you are the one. It's my honor to have been invited to participate. I'm so glad, but you are the one. I mean, it's all honors because you are the one taking this project on.

Valadez Thank you.

[01:32:09]

Hernández Invaluable.

Valadez Thank you.

[End of interview]