

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

Marta Loisa Maestas

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Alfredo Amaya
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Transcription by Dulce Ochoa and Technitype Transcripts

Amaya Please state your full name, birthdate, and marital status.

[00:00:12]

Maestas My name is Marta Loisa Maestas, and my birthday is May 17, and I'm single.

Amaya Do you have children?

[00:00:23]

Maestas Yes, I do. I have two girls, and one of them is a film and media producer, and the other one is a doctor, not a medical, the Doctor of Letters, Ph.D.

Amaya Where were you born and raised?

[00:00:40]

Maestas I was born in Prescott, Arizona, and I was raised there.

Amaya What did your parents do for a living in Arizona?

[00:00:49]

Maestas They did whatever job they could get. For example, my mother worked in the cleaners, she worked cleaning houses. My father was more specialized.

He could do carpentry and he could also work in the fields sometimes. Picking cotton it's what everybody did in Phoenix.

Amaya How many brothers and sisters do you have?

[00:01:10]

Maestas I have two brothers.

Amaya No sisters?

[00:01:13]

Maestas No sisters.

Amaya Can you describe your experiences as a child in your family and in your neighborhood growing up?

[00:01:21]

Maestas Well, my grandmother brought me up because my parents worked in Phoenix, Arizona, which is 90 miles from where I was born, because there was no work in Prescott, and the only thing he could have worked in was the mine, copper mining, and my mother didn't want him dying of tuberculosis within a few short years. So they went to Phoenix to work, and basically my grandmother brought me up. So I was brought up by a whole generation behind my parents' generation, so I grew up with some ideas that were more archaic than my friends'. [laughs]

Amaya Did you live in Arizona your whole life?

[00:01:57]

Maestas My entire life, until I moved to California.

Amaya When did you move to California?

[00:02:01]

Maestas I moved to California in 1962. It's a long time. I went to Kettleman City and then to Stockton. Only the big towns did I hit. [laughs] Then Sacramento.

Amaya Why did you move to California?

[00:02:15]

Maestas My ex at that point had gotten a job, a teaching job, the first bilingual teacher who was going to be out of the Stockton, Kings County area.

Amaya Were you a Fellow or Felito during the Mexican American Education Project?

[00:02:35]

Maestas I was an undergraduate. Did you know the name Felito has been coined. I don't know who coined it, but somebody in this project coined the word *Felito*. But we were undergraduates, all of us. I wish it been the Fellowship, the master's. That would've been great. [laughs]

Amaya How did your participation in the Mexican American Education Project influence your thinking and involvement with the Chicano community?

[00:02:58]

Maestas Moving from Prescott, Arizona, we were a very close-knit group of the Mexican community, but I lived in town, and Hispanics were not allowed to live in town, but I lived in town because my grandmother was a midwife to the doctor and he wanted her close. So I didn't get too much involvement of things that happened there.

When I moved to Sacramento and the Project decided we should be involved in the community, that's when I *really* got my education of working with a Hispanic

community and people who were agricultural workers. So they broadened my perspective of the whole culture.

Amaya How did you get involved to begin with?

[00:03:48]

Maestas With the Project?

Amaya Yes.

[00:03:50]

Maestas My ex-husband got a Fellowship notice and it looked as if the Project was written for him, like they knew him and they wrote the whole project for him to join. But when he got the letter, he got a rejection. I said, "But it was written with you in mind." But his personality was the kind, "Okay, they rejected me. Forget it. I'm on to still teaching." But I was more the "No, do it! Do it again! Do it again! The worst they can say is no." And, sure enough, he sent it in the second time. We got it out of the garbage, cleaned it up and sent it in. [laughs] And he was accepted the second time. So I came that way. But there wasn't a Felito group yet. So when the Felito group was formed, I then decided to join, because I was an undergraduate.

Amaya How did your participation in the Mexican American Project influence your career or life's work?

[00:04:50]

Maestas Most of the courses we took were geared to becoming a teacher, and then somewhere along the line, they started introducing anthropology to us, and I kind of leaned more in that direction. So I took a lot of courses that were offered through the Project that were anthropology courses, and a lot of them that were not,

but were still in the field of anthropology. I got very interested in that, something I never even heard of before, so that that's what I studied.

Amaya Did your study of cultural anthropology influence your involvement and participation in the Movimiento Chicano

[00:05:28]

Maestas Yes, because it's behavioral science, so it's the behavior of humans, and they showed us how to interact and react to different people and situations to keep them on a positive note, and that helped a lot because we started working a lot with the Movement, and we decided that if you want to accomplish something, you have to learn how to work with the people in order to get them to do what you want in order to reach that goal. So that helped a lot. They gave us a lot of pointers that we learned in class, and it was great. It helped us.

Amaya How did you get involved with the Movimiento to begin with?

[00:06:07]

Maestas It started with getting into the community, which is one of the courses we had to take, get involved, get involved in the schools and see what students are doing. I got involved—my first school was an elementary school, so mostly it was games and songs and that kind of thing. Then I got involved with the high school. Now, you get more of your groups of high school students who are very concerned about fair treatment not being given to them like they were to the majority culture. So that got me interested in helping get these kids going, getting them into school, staying in school, getting them the fair treatment that they deserved, and that's what got me started.

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

[00:06:59]

Maestas Well, that would go all the way back to my elementary school, where we *knew* things were different. We were young enough where we weren't quite sure what it was that was different, but we knew things were different within the majority culture and in the minority culture. We knew there was something different.

Junior high, you saw it. You could join some clubs, but other clubs, they didn't say you couldn't join, but they made it so that it was uncomfortable to join, so nobody did.

Then in high school is when it was *really* apparent to me, and that's when I decided I have to do something in order to get to be in all the clubs they have, in order to get to going on those field trips, in order to get all of the things that they were getting. So I joined every club you could. My friends would tell me, "There you go *de metiche*. Why do you go where you're not wanted?"

And I said, "But they don't know they don't want us, so they don't give us a chance to get into their clubs."

So I joined anything I could. I really think I broke the barrier a little bit in I joined not the Cheerleading Club, but the club that's called—now they call them Dancing Cheerleaders, but in my hometown, they were called Pom Pom Girls. Well, that was never going to be, because that was *the* club to be on if you was female. For the guys, it was, of course, athletics. There was no way that they were going to let any minority in there, you know.

There was two new teachers that came on board to our school. They got on the Voting Committee, and they were from the big town of New York. They weren't quite into that Chicanos and Anglo culture being at kind of a clash. They weren't into that yet. It was new in school.

So I made it. I was shocked. Everybody was shocked. The first game—usually the Hispanic community did not go to the games. They just didn't make it comfortable to go. But that night, they all showed up to see if they were going to let me dance. [laughs] And they didn't. When the dance was over, during halftime they were all standing on their feet and yelling. They were going crazy. It was neat. It was neat. It was neat for me.

After that, the following year, *more* Hispanic girls started trying out for that. So it was just an icebreaker. So it helps to get involved, even if you know that you may not make it.

Amaya How did the clubs make you feel uncomfortable?

[00:09:36]

Maestas First of all, there wasn't anyone else joining. You were the only one there, and they would talk around you. You know, you could be sitting there, and you might have an opinion and they might nod in your direction, but go on with something else. So it was really apparent that your presence really wasn't wanted. But nobody was overtly mean to you or overtly racist to you. Subtle racism is the worst because it's very derogatory and it's very divisive. So, yeah, you caught on real fast. They don't want you here, you know. You learned it really quickly.

Amaya How did other Mexican Americans and Latinos react to the term *Chicano* and *Movimiento Chicano*?

[00:10:25]

Maestas Early on, they did not like it. They just didn't like it at first. You know, we had to kind of prove that "This is a good movement. This is good for us. We are trying to make a difference so that we can have equality." That's what people were going for. But for a while, it wasn't a positive thing at first. It was hard work to bring people around, and a lot of people were instrumental in doing that. So it gave it a good vibe after a while.

Amaya What did these people thought *Chicano* was?

[00:11:05]

Maestas I don't think they knew. At first, we didn't know either. We knew it wasn't a race. It took a while for them to tell us, "This is a philosophy, and the philosophy is we would love to have the same opportunities. We want everything to be as equal as anybody else has it." And they weren't seeing that. They had to be educated in that's what it was about, just as we did when we first came in. Because we were also "What's that? I've never heard of that. Have you heard of that?" "No, I haven't heard of that."

Amaya At the time, had you heard of the Civil Rights Movement?

[00:11:45]

Maestas Oh, yeah, I heard about the Civil Rights Movement, but wasn't sure what—other than what we saw on the TV, that would have been the only information I had on the Civil Rights Movement.

Amaya What was this information that you would see on TV?

[00:12:03]

Maestas We would see the things like when the schools were being integrated, we would hear about the terrible things that were happening to the Blacks in the South. You know, we heard of those things. There were pretty awful things happening because they were so violent, you know.

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

[00:12:32]

Maestas Well, yeah, just like all of your experience changes you personally. I became more aware of the oppression that could be put on people. I became more aware of it doesn't have to be that way. It can be changed. It's work, but you can do it. It can be changed in a positive way so that it happens sooner. There was a lot of things, and we knew that even the smallest little thing you could do would change it for the better, and there were a lot of small things that happened that changed that big picture for the way it is now. There is still work to be done though. It's never-ending.
[laughs]

Amaya What kind of work do you think could still be done?

[00:13:19]

Maestas For example, the students in the schools have got to be kept in school, kept going to school, getting an education, getting a higher education, not just high school, but higher education, keeping them in school. They would rather "quituate" than graduate. That's always been the easy road. And just keeping them there, better

jobs, not just become a secretary, but maybe become the president of the company. Have to hit them for that direction, and I think that would do it. It's an ongoing battle keeping our students in school.

Amaya What role do you believe the Chicanas played in the Movimiento?

[00:14:09]

Maestas I think it got a lot of people *super* involved, I mean all over. At first, I know in Arizona, I was from Arizona and my parents were still there, they hadn't heard very much about the Chicano Movement or anything like that. About '72, '73, by that time, they were going great guns. They had seen what we could do in California, and they were starting doing it in Arizona.

As a matter of fact, my own parents had never heard of *Chicanismo*. "That's that? What are you talking about?" We tried to explain to her. I came here in '68 or '69. By 1972, my mother and my father were one of the biggest movers and shakers in Arizona for the Chicano Movement. And I was shocked, because my parents are not like that. [laughs] As a matter of fact, my mom has won many awards from the Mexican community for her work during that time, and also from the state of Arizona, if you can believe that, because it tends to be a little bit on the racist side. [laughs] But she did, and that was starting from not knowing, and asking, "What's that?" and then getting information. She did a great job. After that, I was calling her, "Mom, what do you do when this happens? Mom, how do you get people to do this work for themselves for the betterment of themselves? How can we get them motivated to do that?" And she would give me pointers. And this is from a lady who went to fifth grade and that's it.

Amaya So around what time was it when news of the Chicano Movement reached Arizona?

[00:16:00]

Maestas I'm thinking it was in '72 it got really going strong. As I look back on her awards, they're all from '72. That was the earliest I've seen, and on.

Amaya What did you personally initiate or help initiate in this Movimiento Chicano?

[00:16:24]

Maestas Personally, I would go to schools. We did a lot of talking, a lot of seminars in the schools. We did a lot of reaching out via MEChA and MAPA and all of those. We didn't belong to those organizations, because they're high school, but we did go and give speeches—not speeches, more talks with the kids getting all excited about who they were and everything about themselves, their background, and getting more kids to join them. We did a lot of that, a lot of doing community work like talking to parents about their children and being interested in their children's education, because remember the Project we were in was all about education, so we headed in that direction. That was our strength, was to talk about education and staying educated.

Amaya Of those experiences, is there any that stand out?

[00:17:27]

Maestas A couple. With all the things I learned from the Project, in the Project, the Project title is perhaps, because, like I told you, they are very passionate people in the Project that used to like to tweak the program. We'd come in and we'd say,

“Well, yeah, we like this, but we want to change it like this.” And we’d go to the people who were in charge and tell them. In this case, it’d be like Steve Arvizu or someone telling them, “We want to do this instead. We didn’t like that other way.” And they took that passion that we had for wanting to change things and they taught us how to lobby our ideas, how to present them, and then get what we wanted done. So we learned that, and we took that and used that a lot in everything we did with the community, with parents, with other teachers when they were teaching children other languages. We’d do that a lot. We learned to lobby our ideas.

Amaya What were some of the organizations that you were involved in? You said you were helping out with MEChA.

[00:18:50]

Maestas MEChA and MAPA. Like I said, we gave a lot of speeches. We gave a lot of seminars. I remember the bank of Wells Fargo hired us to go give in-services so that their employees would learn how to deal with people who were of other cultures, so we did that, and we did that three or four times.

We went to D-Q University and we also helped them. We gave those in-services to the teachers there and everything and tried to help them. They were just getting started at that time and trying to get interest in it.

In Elk Grove, I did a “Words and Phrases that Hurt” seminar for not just the Hispanics, but the Black community. They were up in arms in those days. And we would go give in-services to parents and to the teachers to help with the problems that was happening in the schools.

And all of this stuff is done without any kind of pay, with nothing. It would be our entire day, because remember we were students, an entire day of student teaching and working in classroom, our own class, doing our schoolwork, trying to get our degree, and we were still doing those things.

Amaya What significance did the activities or organizations created play in the Movement Chicano?

[00:20:31]

Maestas Like what do you mean?

Amaya Any important items that these organizations brought into the Movimiento?

[00:20:46]

Maestas Well, when we worked with the schools, of course it helped them a lot. Elk Grove would call on us a lot to come in and help them with the parents. So, apparently, whatever we were doing was helping. And remember there was like, I don't know, there was like twenty-five or more of us in the Felito Program, and when you have that many people going and showing an interest in what you're doing, it carries a lot of weight. And not only that, when you have that many people, you have a lot of resources to go to, to help you with whatever project you're doing.

I know they had a Breakfast for Niños that they got done, and there was a science program [National Chicanito Science Project] this person [Alvino Chavez] had started. He wasn't in the Fellowship at all, but he got the interest of the people who were in the Fellowship, and they helped him do his science program that he had

for the children, and it stayed. Long after his death, it was still going on. So, you know, those were good things that we helped with.

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

[00:22:01]

Maestas I'll tell you it raised by consciousness in this manner: I found that there were more differences within the Chicano culture than I had never even dreamed up. For example, in our family and in my neighborhood, we celebrated Christmas a certain way, and I thought that was the only way Chicanos celebrated Christmas. I went to Phoenix to a friend of mine's house, they did it totally different! I thought, "Whoa! What? What's wrong with them?" [laughs]

And when we went to Mexico for a celebration with the Project, they were doing it *way* different! You found out within all these differences and all this diversity went to make up what we were, what Chicano philosophy was and what our Chicano, if you will, culture was, because it wasn't the culture of Mexico. It was a culture we had all put together here in the United States when we came here. Because we found that out really quick. We had a culture shock when we went to Mexico, not only of the language, but of the customs and of the food. We thought *tacos, tortillas, frijoles* and all that. They had a lot of different things, a lot of things that you would consider European, lots of fish dishes that were prepared different. Anyway, all that went to make up us. It took that trip, it took the studies that we did here to figure that one out, that, you know, our little world wasn't the Chicano *raza*. The *whole* world that was out there that was Hispanic.

Amaya Did these changes impact your personal relationships with family, peers, and significant others?

[00:23:50]

Maestas I became more accepting of differences. I became a lot more accepting of people's opinions that were different from my own, different ways of doing the same thing. Even though we're hitting it for the same goal, they had a different way of doing it. It makes you totally accept, not just tolerate, but really truly accept people's differences and not just my way. [laughs]

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

[00:24:33]

Maestas It got me into bilingual education. I helped to devise a test for Hispanic children that were coming in so that they could be tested on what they knew before they learned English, because they would sometimes wait for you to learn English in order to test you, and by that time, you might have missed out on a whole lot. So we devised a test. The way we devised it was we translated it so that it would be the same as what the majority culture was taking, only in your own language. We did that. It took a long time and the district used it.

Then we had little in-services for the teachers and we taught them. We shared with them; we didn't teach them. We shared with them how you interact with children of other languages and their parents, because not just Mom and Dad came to those teacher-parent conference meetings; you had an entire family coming in on

many of those. The aunt, the uncle, and the grandma would come, and teachers didn't quite know how to deal with it. They only wanted to meet with the parents.

We would do in-services for the types of music and things to use with the kids, to teach them English while teaching them whatever else activity they were doing, math, teaching them songs with numbers while they were learning English, which was easier that way. We did a lot of that.

Amaya Anything else that you did?

[00:26:17]

Maestas I can't think of anything else that we did, but whatever it was we were doing, I can tell you just of the Felitos that I know that went on and became educators, because those are the people I kept most track of, they have all become either head of the department that they worked in, and that's because of the work they were doing. They were shining, they've gotten awards, they have been recognized by their peers for their abilities, and that all came from being within the Project, having them introduce us to different modes of learning and acting with people.

I'll tell you, I had been in college before, I had taken courses at ASU in Arizona, and I came here, and when I was in the Project, the networking that they did and showed us how to do within this society of the college and university was *tremendous*. I think that we tried to teach that. When we'd go meet with the high school kids, we tried to tell them, especially the ones that were getting ready to graduate, we'd try to impart to them the knowledge that we had of how you can work and network within college in order to be successful, because it is so contrived when you are in school, trying to get to your classes and trying to get this class and that

class, and this book and that book, and get to where you're going. It's very complicated. But once you know the system, you can really work it to your advantage. We did a lot of that with the graduating students, trying to get them to be successful when they first stepped in that door so they weren't defeated. I can't think of nothing else.

Amaya These students that graduated, did they ever come back and thank you?

[00:28:20]

Maestas Oh, yes, you get that all the time. Sometimes you meet them on the street. I'm retired, so I don't see them in classrooms, but I used to have them come back when I was teaching in the school district. They'd come back and thank you for what you'd done for them, and that was great. That was great. We learned a lot.

One time we had a student who's now a doctor, medical doctor, and she was from Spain. Of course, she was learning English and, of course, there again, the Latino, the Hispanic culture was in play there. When I had the parent-teacher conferences, they would bring me—they were shepherders. They brought me a leg of lamb. Every time they came for anything, they brought a piece of meat, because that's what he did, he butchered lambs and things of that nature, which is, to us, you know, wow! Every teacher that child got, they would get the leg of lamb [laughs] for the teacher-parent conference. It took us a while. They didn't want us at that point to accept it, but we told them, "This is the way they operate. This is the way we will do, because we don't want to alienate the parents because they don't know our way." So it worked out.

When we got the Russian children, children again from another language, another culture, first day of school, I had fifteen in my classroom. I got fifteen bouquets of flowers. In their culture, they bring flowers the first day of school. The first bouquet you got, you go, "Oh, thank you." Then the next one and the next. "Wow! What's this?" That was their way when they came to school. So we learned to accept those things. At first, the office was saying, "You can't have all this." You know, kids with asthma, kids with this and that. But we learned to accept that, the differences. So I've learned to be very accepting of a lot of things that, before, I wasn't.

Amaya Looking back at your experiences in the Movimiento Chicano, are there any issues that were left unresolved?

[00:30:36]

Maestas With the Movement itself? You know, I think the Movement is still going, needs to be still going on. We still have the kids not getting the education they should have. Because we have such an influx all the time of new people coming in from different countries, not just Mexico, but from everywhere, we still have to push for our equality. The racism isn't gone. That is never going to go. The segregation isn't gone. We have to always keep chipping away at it, chipping away at it.

I don't know if you know this, but in Sacramento there's a charter for William Land Park, and the charter says that they will not sell to Black, Brown, or Chinese a house there. Now, whether they follow through with that or not, it's there. Nobody's ever taken that off the charter, and it's always been there. So, you know, it's always

there underlying. Even though they don't overtly act on it, it's always there. You always have to be aware of those things.

I'll tell you one thing I got out of the Chicano Movement. We used to get together to sing all the time at school, and sometimes at home my grandmother would put on the radio and be singing, that kind of thing. When I came here to Sacramento, they had already a culture that they would get together and everybody, everybody who had heard, "Hey, there's going to a party at a place," and you'd get a *crowd* of people just to sing songs, just to sing songs, not to get together to vote to overthrow the government or anything like that [laughs], but just to sing songs, to get together with something that was part of their culture. I thought that was beautiful. I loved that. It wasn't a part of my culture where I grew up. So I loved that.

As a matter of fact, the Project that was here at Sac State ran off a songbook for all of the Felitos so we all could know the words, because some of us didn't know the words to the songs because we grew up in a time where you didn't speak Spanish, not in school, because you were disciplined for that. So getting together and being able to sing those songs, we could even sing those songs in the rooms at Sac State [laughs], and nobody said, "Hey, you can't be singing those songs in Spanish." It was neat.

I then heard different types of music, a lot of what they call *rancheras*, *corridos*, those kinds of things. I used to be more into other things than that. So I got introduced to some music and art. Art was another thing that was a great outlet for a *lot* of kids. There was at least four Felitos I can think of that would have quit had it not been for art. Esteban Villa was an art teacher that was very outgoing and funny,

and he would talk to these kids, and while he was talking, he was doing art. I didn't bring that with me, but I have a picture where he got a whole bunch of markers, different-colored markers, and he said he was going to draw a picture and not take the markers off the paper. He was just goofing around. I don't think he knew he could do that. So he did this, and it's a huge painting of a revolutionary fighter with the crossed b_____ and the bullets and all that, and I have that one. These guys were really interested. I remember them sitting there, we were all sitting there, we were amazed by his ability.

These kids went on to become teachers, and good art teachers, by the way. But they were already bored with all of the courses we were taking. All those 101 courses that you have to take, they were getting bored with it. They weren't getting things that were in their area of interest, so they were already mumbling and grumbling about quitting. And he introduced them and me, although I'm not an art teacher, to art. I just love art.

So, you know, it was great. That was definitely time of a lot of exploration that went on, a lot of "Gee, you can do this thing, you can do it, and you can do it in a peaceful way. You can even go up to people who are in charge and higher up and actually talk to them and get things you want done."

Jerry Brown was governor at the time. We were really incensed with something that they were doing, and the funny thing is, it was so important that I can't remember what it was about, but we were super incensed that this was going on. I can't remember who it is. I'm sure it had to do with something about women. It had to be, because I'm thinking of the people that were involved, they were all into

“Women Unite,” strong women. I remember going up to Governor Brown’s office, and we thought we were going to leave him our proposal, and he couldn’t say he didn’t get in the mail because we were going to hand it to his secretary and she would have it.

Remember I told you we learned different ways to deal and interact and react to people and most of them should be peaceful? Well, a lot of people from the community didn’t take those courses. [laughs] One of the girls went up with this, and she was a little more reactionary, shall we say, than the rest of us. When we left the petition, the secretary that was in charge, she gave us a vibe that, number one, “I don’t like dealing with Hispanics.” Number two, “You’re beneath me even if you’re not Hispanic, because I am the secretary of the governor.” You know, she gave us that vibe. She never said it, but it was that vibe she was giving out.

It was so strong, that we were going, “Oh! We don’t want to talk to this lady. She’s terrible.” She’s just said one more thing and flipped her hair. In flipping her hair, she flipped off this other person that was with us. This is very reactionary. And she kind of gave her a slap push, but not really, and the girl fell down from shock, I think, more than anything, because she didn’t hurt her.

Later on, an apology was extended to the governor, and he liked it. He told the person who was apologizing, “That’s okay. She was left over from the Reagan administration,” which we thought was hilarious. But that’s just an example. We were supposed to learn how to deal with people in a more subtle way, not be so reactionary. [laughs] But it gave us the impetus of, again, you can go up there. You don’t have to be afraid. Your opinion is as good as anyone else’s. Like I said, we

learned that at the Project. If you want something, learn to lobby for it, get your support, present your case, and do it in a way that's not going to turn off your listener. So we did that. [laughs] In that way, that was one little glitch that that we didn't quite make that day, but we learned. Anyway, there's nothing else I can think of.

Amaya You were saying the outlets of using art and singing. Did these have any effects during the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:38:13]

Maestas Oh, it had a lot. In the middle of Sac State used to be a huge oak tree, and around this oak tree we would all sit, and somebody would bring a guitar. Sometimes Esteban Villa would come by and sit during classes and sing songs. Sometimes other people that weren't in the group had guitars and they would bring them. It would call people who were *not* in the Project to our group, who were saying, "Hey, you guys are here and you guys are getting along fine," and we would get them into our way of thinking.

As we looked around, we saw that the student government that at that time was totally just majority culture kids in there, and we thought we should get somebody else in there too. Well, one person who was not in the group, was not a member of the Project, was going to run. I don't remember if his last name was Vegas or Garcia or something like that. But sitting every day at that oak tree, singing songs and getting people to come in, we started saying, "We want you to vote for this guy." Well, he did get to be president. He did make it. So we kind of got a little politics in there with that little political movement of singing. It attracts people and it attracts people in a very positive way. You know, you get people happy and singing, they're

more going to be thinking how you're thinking and going for your goals also. Well, we all know that. Anytime you get an event going here, "Oh, we're going to have the *ballet folklórico*," "Oh, we're going to have so-and-so singing," "Oh, we're going to have this band," you know, music is a draw, a big draw. So we used it to our advantage many times.

Amaya How about art?

[00:40:02]

Maestas In art, the way to express yourself was a great vehicle for a lot of people. I don't draw, but I drew a lot then. I'm not artsy crafty at all. I go buy the arts and crafts and say I did it. No, I don't. [laughs] But I do buy it. But I learned to use a squeegee. Okay, it was for political purposes, because my first one was of a fist in the air and it said "Unite." "*Huelga*" was another one we did a lot. But it was learning the different techniques that were for art, not just sitting at the easel drawing, but there were other ways.

We learned to do the pottery, and nobody was saying, "This is good. That's bad." You like it, it's good. You know, it's yours. So it's a method of expressing yourself without any criticism whatsoever. So that was fun and it was good, and the people that were there in charge of those courses were good teachers. It was a safe place to do your art, so it was neat. We got great rapport with the professors. In my case, I had [José] Montoya as my instructor. He was great. He was great.

Amaya Was there negative approaches due to the art or the singing during this time?

[00:41:36]

Maestas No, not that I can think of, no, not due to the art or the singing or things, but due to some of the—when you get impassioned about a project, you get impassioned about an idea, you tend to go at it with gusto, and I think when we first went into the community, it was with that gusto. “We know what the problem is. We have the solution, right? All you have is do what we say. We have the solution.” I think we went at that too hard and too fast and people decided, “Okay, you’re going to college, you’re coming here with these ideas, you guys are a bunch of *vendidos*.” That was a big thing. They thought we were all *vendidos*, but more so the Fellows, the Felitos [laughs], because they had more of this gung-ho-ness.

As a matter of fact, I think they made some sweatshirts, they were brown sweatshirts, and the motif was that of the Aztec calendar, and across they had *Vendidos* written on them, because afterwards it became a joke. It became the community had accepted them already and remembered that they used to call them *vendidos*. It became a joke that they both shared equally. It was great. Not so much towards the Felitos. We were much younger than the Fellows, so they probably thought, “Okay, you guys are safe. We can handle you.” [laughs] Yeah, it took a little while to get the community to come with us, and, again, we used a lot of the music to do that and a lot of get-togethers and a lot of *tacos* and things of that nature being done.

We had one lady who became my very dear friend, her name was Marta, same as me, Pintera. She gave us a run for our money. Boy, we weren’t going to come pushing our ideas so hard and so fast at her and her community, and then she became our best supporter, our most dogged supporter. Once we all sat down and she knew

what we were all about, she became a very staunch supporter. But, yeah, that's when we learned when you go into a community, go in on their terms, go in treading softer than you would like. We used the music, we used the art. They had a lot of displays. They would get art for the kids to do and display those and have Open Houses so they could see all the art and things. Events always work, especially when you're using things from their own community. So it worked out well.

Amaya Describe how the *Movimiento Chicano* impacted community life here in Sacramento or anywhere where you lived.

[00:44:36]

Maestas Well, here it impacted it in such a way that I think that we had a lot of programs, especially Breakfast for Niños came about. They had preschools that kids could go to, and I think those were ongoing. I assume they're still ongoing. The thing is, once you graduate and you move to your own town in your own community, you know, you lose track. But when I look around, and the way to judge how well you did was to see are there more of the children, of the minority children, are there more of them in preschool? Are there more of them in the high schools? Are there more of them graduating? Are there more of them graduating in jobs that are not gardening jobs? Not that there is anything wrong with being a gardener, but that are high-paying jobs. Are there more of them as CEOs? Are the more of them not just as teachers, but as professors? That's a good bar to see. That's a good criteria. Are there more of these people in the minorities in these jobs and in these places?

Truthfully, I haven't done a study on it to see what kind of impact is still going on, but I do see a lot of children in the preschool, because my grandson went to

preschool and I see a lot of them in there learning, and a lot of them are minorities. I see kids walking to school, a lot of minorities walking to school, going to school. In high school, I lived pretty close to Hiram Johnson, so that has got a good section of minority children going to it. I noticed that they're there. They're there in the high schools now. So we made some impact as teachers, I think, and as people working in the community and as counselors, because we had a lot of counselors. Felitos were being counselors as well as teachers.

Amaya What do you see as current or future challenges for the Chicano community?

[00:46:45]

Maestas Exactly that: keep the kids in school, keep them learning, keep applying for those jobs. The worst anyone can say when you go for a job is, "No." And you can keep at it, you know, and get those good jobs. Don't think you can't do it. Just give people that encouragement to do it and keep them in school all the way through. You know, if you can get a B.A., you can get a master's. You get a master's, you can get a doctorate. You know, that's not a problem. You can do it. So if we did it, anybody can do it. [laughs]

When the Felitos came on, they used to refer to us as "the street people," not the kind that you see pushing the carts [laughs], but as people who are out in the street trying to get an education, trying to earn a living, because a lot of them were working and had *no* thought of coming to college, *none*, when they were recruited. By recruited, I mean we got our notices. We said, "Oh, yeah, there's this project happening at Sac State." Then word of mouth got around, and, "Yeah, try it! What are

you going to do? Just try.” And that’s the way we got in. So there were people who had not planned to go and who were very thrilled to find out that it was a full ride. So it made a difference, made a difference in that community, in the community here in Sacramento and the one I was in Stockton. Quite a few came from that area too. So it was a time of a lot of change. We like to think we were agents of change. [laughs]

Amaya Would you consider yourself an agent of change?

[00:48:28]

Maestas Not when it gives it like that on the bus. [laughs] I think so. The biggest change was in myself. I changed a *lot*, a lot, became less afraid to do things, less afraid to say things, less afraid to get out and get dirty and roll up your sleeves and get to work, even though it’s not anything you’ve ever done before or any place I’d ever been before. So the greatest change as in myself, and I think other people were able to do things and to move the community. I started small. I had started with me first. So that’s what I’ve done.

Amaya Were you a source of change for other people?

[00:49:17]

Maestas I think probably in the district I worked in, yeah. The district I worked in, which happened to be in Elk Grove, was pretty close-minded about a lot of things, and I think that just getting the parents behind me and getting other teachers interested, the teachers were very open-minded, it helped within my school, and then slowly it spread out to the school district. Of course, at that time, federal monies also helped, because they would give monies to a school district who was trying to make impact and change in bilingual education and educating children of other cultures, so

that helped a lot too. I became a grant writer, and in that way I helped, writing grants. I got many for the district.

Amaya Do you see yourself as staying involved in meetings these challenges?
[00:50:26]

Maestas Yeah, you never get uninvolved. You *never* get uninvolved, because you see it all the time. Yeah, I am still working on it. I still do. I still do workshops, I still do in-services, still do those things.

Amaya Do you think there should be more involvement as there is right now?
[00:50:50]

Maestas Absolutely. I think so. I used to have a whole packet of papers that were written by the Fellows. They used to do papers and they would turn them in, and then these papers were run off and given to us to read so we could see the types of writing, when we finished our courses as undergraduates, how we would be able to write these little proposals and dissertations and other papers. I took a few of them, gave them to people in my school district, and some of them were on how you deal with children with other languages, some of them were on music, some of them were on different topics. They gave them to kids to read, but the best thing, it wasn't what was in it, but what I wanted them to see that it was written by somebody with a Hispanic last name. So you get it out there, "These people can write like this, you know. Don't underestimate anybody because of their last name being Hispanic or because they are Hispanic." So we did that a lot, and I've seen some of them still out there.

I wrote one called “Cultural Conflict in the Classroom” as probably my first thing I’d ever written when I was going through the master’s degree. It wasn’t part of my master’s; it was part of a class. I turned it out to a couple of teachers, and they gave it to a school district in Los Angeles, who ran it off for students to read, for students who were wanting to become teachers and for teachers too. And now I see it’s being sold on Amazon. It is terribly written. [laughs] When I look at it now, I think, “Oh, my goodness,” and you can’t rewrite it. But things like that I’ve given out, that they wrote here, so they could see that. You keep doing things like that. I wish I hadn’t gotten rid of so many because I put them on the net. Can you imagine all the people that would read them? But I no longer have all those copies, but if they got their copies and shared them with people, if they have them still, I mean, it’s just coursework. Sometimes you just throw it away. You got your grade and [demonstrates]. A lot of them were excellent, excellent. So, hopefully, they’re still helping somehow somewhere in somebody’s classroom.

Amaya Is there anything else you’d like to add?

[00:53:26]

Maestas I can think of actually nothing else, really.

Amaya Do you think there’s anything the Chicano community now can do in order to keep progressing for other Chicanos?

[00:53:50]

Maestas I think it’s changed a lot, so it’s hard for me to say. When I used to work in the community, really in the community, work with the people that live there, they were more cohesive because they all sort of lived in the same place. But now

they've disbanded the community as a whole, so you get together during events only, usually. There used to be called, I think, Alkali Flats downtown. A lot of people live there, but now Alkali Flats has become something totally different and it's no longer the area where all of the Hispanics live anymore. If you want to get a community together, you hold an event, you hold a dance recital, you have *ballet folklórico* come, or you have an art exhibition like some of the groups are having and you reach them that way. It's no longer that cohesive. We all don't live in the same area together anymore. I noticed that disappeared.

Amaya That is all I have.

[00:55:00]

Maestas All right. Thank you.

Amaya Thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences with us and for future interests.

[00:55:10]

Maestas Thank you.

[End of interview]