

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

Rhonda Ríos Kravitz

Oral History Memoir

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Transcription by Gabriela Avila and Technitype Transcripts

Q Can you please state your full name?

[00:00:12]

Kravitz My name is Rhonda Ríos Kravitz.

Q And your birthdate as well, please.

[00:00:15]

Kravitz I was born five years after the war, so been around a long time.

Q What is your current marital status?

[00:00:23]

Kravitz I'm married and have one daughter.

Q How old is she?

[00:00:27]

Kravitz My daughter's thirty, and she's completing her Ph.D. in June. She's working on the impact of neighborhoods in health disparities, and it's in sociology.

Q Where were you born and raised?

[00:00:42]

Kravitz I was born in San Francisco, and my first years were in Hunters Point, so I grew up in a housing project. I'm a biethnic person. My mother was *mexicana*, my father was Jewish, so both were very poor. My father was raised by a single mom, and my grandmother escaped the pogroms with her family. So she was one of thirteen kids that came from Russia and came to the U.S. She would marry, but would raise her kids by herself as a single mom. She would identify as a communist and worked very hard for civil rights issues and social justice issues. In fact, my dad would deliver a paper that was called *The People's World*, which was a communist paper, when he was a teen, and it really dealt with labor issues, immigrant issues, social justice issues, issues of peace. So my grandmother was very much an activist. My father was the first generation born in the U.S.

My mother's side, my mother's *mexicana*. My mother is a first generation born in the United States as well. She was one of seven kids, but when my mom was really young, about eight, her mother, so my *abuelita*, died, and I think she died because they didn't have access to healthcare, so had they had access to healthcare, she probably would have lived. So we really feel that that was due to lack of access to healthcare.

My grandfather didn't speak English, so they took all seven kids away and they put them in White foster homes, and that experience would, for my mom, be an experience that terrified her, so she never wanted me to speak out. So I had my father's mom, who's an activist, *very* socially engaged, always took me to all of these rallies. I went to so many fundraisers with her to try to raise money for these various issues, but for my mom, that experience was such a hard experience, such a negative

experience, since they took the kids and put them all in separate foster homes, so they were separated, and yet as a *familia*, they were *very* much closely tied together, so it was a very tough and hard experience.

The oldest sister was thirteen at the time, and they actually made her be a maid in Burlingame, which was a long way away from San Francisco. She would have to get on a bus and go and be a maid and come back. She would get married very early, at about fifteen, sixteen, so that she could bring back all the kids. So she worked hard at getting all the kids back together so they would continue to be a family, because *familia* was really key and was really important.

Q So how many brothers and sisters did you have?

[00:03:30]

Kravitz I have one brother.

Q What's the age difference?

[00:03:34]

Kravitz Ten months, ten months apart. [laughter] Yes, people always called us twins. They said we looked like twins. As a result, my mother said, "That's it. Two kids are enough. I was pregnant for twenty-four months," she felt like. [laughs]

Q Can you please explain your experience as a child, as you said before, and in your youth? How was your neighborhood?

[00:03:53]

Kravitz I grew up in Hunters Point, so, obviously, communities of color. So half my family lived in Hunters Point, half of my family lived in the Mission District. Although my grandmother was Jewish, she didn't really have a lot of family here. I

knew nothing about my Jewish traditions. I grew up really in my Latino side only, if you ask me how do I identify, I'd say I identify as Chicana.

When I was about ten, my father got hurt. He became a journeyman working on big printer presses, and so he apprenticed and then became a journeyman, but got hurt on those machines and lost the fingertips on his hand, and that would allow us to get out of the housing projects. So they then moved from the housing projects and bought a house, but we were only in that house for about a year and a half when my father lost his job. My father was a union organizer, very committed to strong unions and working to really engage people in unions and making unions a key critical part of their lives.

So we had to move. My mother and my brother and I lived in San Francisco for a year because we didn't want to leave. The city was where my mom knew and was born, you know, really was close to the city, all our family was there, but we couldn't stay there because we couldn't survive. So we moved to Elk Grove. My dad at that time thought, "Oh, Elk Grove is this community where it's got horses and it's got acreage," and whatnot.

My brother and I were like, "Oh, my god." When we got to Elk Grove, it was a small city. It was, I think, like 3,500 people, and they had mailboxes with flags on it and we're like, "Oh, you have to go out and get mail and put a little flag up to get your thing." We'd write back to our friends, "This is really terrible. We do not want to be in this city." Because we were used to an urban environment, and this was a very rural environment. It wasn't what we were used to.

In the summers, I'd work in the fields. I worked picking tomatoes, and that for me was, I think, one of my key shaping experiences, because the experiences were horrific working in the fields. There were no bathrooms. When we would get water, the water truck would come by with one cup, and everyone would stand in line and you'd only get that water. I think maybe once a day we'd have water, and you'd just wait for that little water cup, and it was hot. At that time, too, they sprayed the fields next to you with insecticides. So I'd always wear my scarves and whatnot because the smell of the insecticide and being exposed to the chemicals was really horrific and was really horrible.

Also, there were not a lot of Chicanos and Latinos when I went to school, high school, because I went to high school in Elk Grove. So that was a hard experience for me because we were separated, we didn't have family up here, but a lot of my friends were Japanese Americans. We would also pick in the fields together, and they would tell me, "You know, this used to be my land," or, "This used to be my house." And that's when I learned about the Japanese internment camp experiences, because their parents were interned. Some of them were born in the camps, some of them, their brothers and sisters were, but they had owned those houses or that land.

So, social justice issues, working in the fields, having had those experiences with my grandmother, who was a communist, working with my dad, who was very much a union organizer, were really part of who I was. They were the collective of who I was.

I would graduate from Elk Grove as the valedictorian—

Q That's amazing.

Kravitz —so I had the top grades in my class, but not *one* counselor told me that I could go to college, and I knew nothing about college. My father graduated from high school, but my mom and all her seven siblings, they never graduated from high school. They were very poor, they had to work very early, so they never graduated. So no one in my family knew anything about colleges.

But one of my friends, who was White, in Elk Grove said, “My sister goes to UC Davis. You should be able to go to college. Look, you got these grades; you have the top grades. I think you should go to college.”

And I had been given a MAYA scholarship, a Mexican American Youth Association scholarship, so I had a scholarship that would pay my first year in full to go to college, but I didn’t know how to use it. I didn’t really know about college.

So I’d go home and I told my dad, “I really want to go to college. My friend has said that I could really do this. And I want to go to Davis,” because that’s where her sister went, and she thought she was going to go to Davis too.”

And my father went, “Elk Grove and Davis? That is *too* far. You *cannot* go that far. *Absolutely* not.” The only college he knew about was Sac State, because he had worked at a printing press place that was near Sac State at that point. So he said, “Well, if you really think you should go, go apply to Sac State.” So that’s how I started my college career, was at Sac State.

Q What did you major in?

[00:08:50]

Kravitz At first, I was majoring—I didn't know what to major in. So, I mean, really, going to college was like, "I don't really know what I'm doing." I had really high grades in math and in science, so I decided I'd work in the sciences, so I did that.

My first year was really hard. I didn't know about EOP&S. I obviously could have been an EOP&S student. I didn't know how to navigate; I didn't know how to even go from class from class; I didn't know how to register; I didn't know where to get help. So it was, for me, a very frightening and alienating experience. But in my first year, I actually did well in my grades.

But then my grandmother died, and she died of cancer. She had come to live with us, and it was a horrific death. It carried on for a while. And that just sort of destroyed my world. I then decided I'd major in humanities, because I needed to answer questions. Why does someone die? Why is someone taken from you in this horrific way?

So I majored in the humanities and I had minors in chemistry and in Ethnic Studies. So I loved Ethnic Studies. That was the first time I even realized that there were people of color writing, that they were scholars, that they were artists, they were poets, they were scientists. It was such a new world for me, and it was *so* exciting. So that was my first opportunity to really be exposed to the literature of people of color and really begin to think differently. So, for me, college was really mind-shaping and mind-changing.

Q And were you a part of the Fellow or Felito, or were you actively involved in the Mexican American Education Project?

[00:10:38]

Kravitz You know, when the program, the Mexican American Education Program, that was a master's program and I was just starting as a freshman. The program had only been in existence for two or three years. So I'm, like, the second generation. I call myself the second or third generation of the Felitos, because I wasn't there. So that was not something that I knew about, but I wish I had known about them, because they would have been, I think, really key to me.

Their mission was so critical at the time, because I felt their goal was really to prepare educational change agents, which is how I hope I see myself today. I'd hope I've been active as a change agent. But in high school, I never had Latino faculty, I never had any curriculum that was relevant to Chicanos and Latinos. So when I went to, as I said, to Sac State and began that program in Ethnic Studies, that was just exciting. So this program, obviously, was key and influential.

The next question, in terms with the involvement, my involvement really came years later because I would go on and get a master's in library science. I went to Simmons College in Boston and then I worked in Massachusetts for eight and a half years as a librarian, a medical librarian.

But I would come back. I wanted to come back to California because my family was here and really extremely close to my family, and my daughter had been born. So my daughter was two. I applied for a position as the ethnic services consultant for the state library, and that was truly an exciting position. So I traveled the entire state, building collections and services to Chicano/Latino communities, to African American communities, to Native communities, and predominantly Asian Pacific Islanders and Southeast Asian populations. So that was an *incredible*

experience for me to work and really begin to really work with the scholarship and the books and the materials and the services that would really reach to what we were calling the emerging majorities at the time. So it was a powerful experience. I worked there for three years.

Then Sac State recruited me to work as a librarian faculty member at Sac State. So I'd come back, and when I came back, that's where I met many of the Fellows who had become faculty members. Renee Marino and I worked together very closely. I met Senon. I met Olivia Castellano. So I met a number of the Latino faculty when I came on to the campus as a Chicano/Latino faculty member myself. So it was then that I began to experience and know and really love working.

So I worked with José Montoya, S_____, Sam Rios, and then that was really, I think, a key and core period of my life, for these were my mentors, these were the people who really enabled me to succeed in Sac State. I'm an alum, but now coming back as a faculty member, coming back and working in an environment where I can really build a Chicano/Latino collection and really work with Chicano/Latino faculty to work for the hiring, the retention, and really the promotion of faculty of color was really key and important. So these were my giants, these were my mentors, these were the people that really motivated me.

When I first came to Sac State, I was what was called a target-of-opportunity position. President Gerth at that time had created what he called target of opportunity. If a department were to hire a person of color, he would give them a position. So the way you would get a position, the way he could diversify the faculty was to give the department a position, since they were not hiring faculty of color.

So I came in that way, but when they interviewed you, they never told you that were in a target-of-opportunity position. So you applied for the job. I did get the job, but when I came in, I walked up the steps of the ramp to the library, I was met by one of the librarians, who told me, “You know, you didn’t get this job because you have any talents. You only got this job because of the color of your skin. So know that.”

So it became for me at the very beginning a very oppressive situation. Of course, my anger is—you know, I’d been working for three years, really working hard to create environments for people of color with the public libraries. At that time, I also had become the president of Reforma. Reforma was a library organization which was really dedicated to building services and collections for the Latino- and Spanish-speaking populations throughout the state. So I’d been working hard to create equity, and to be faced with this situation was just disheartening.

But at the same time, another person who was really key and critical—and I don’t think she was a Fellow—Isabela Hernandez-Serna. She had called me that day and she said, “You know, we have a Chicano/Latino Staff and Faculty Association. We want you to come. We’re having a meeting the next day.” And it was because of her work and her commitment to calling every new Chicano/Latino staff and faculty person that came in, integrating them into the campus and letting them know that we worked as a collective and we worked together for social justice that really kept me going there. So that was really key and really important to sustaining my existence.

We had two groups. We had the Chicano/Latino Staff and Faculty, that was by virtue just being Chicano or Latino, but we also had an organization called AME,

which was the Association of Mexican American Educators. That was predominantly only on K-through-12 campuses. We were the only college campus in the state of California to have a chapter, and Renee was the president of that. We became co-chairs, so together we worked on many issues at Sac State, issues of equity for Latinos students, really trying to make sure the curriculum was responsive, and we worked to engage Chicano/Latino students. We worked really hard on creating environments to recruit, retain, and promote faculty of color. So Renee became a very important part of my life.

So I started in 1990. 1994, of course, was Proposition 187. 1996 was Proposition 209. Then you had Proposition 227. All of those were key negative Propositions, and José and a number of the other Latino faculty and I worked together to defeat those propositions.

I think one of the other things that really moved me at the time, too, was that Renee was head of OLE, which was the Optimal Learning Environment, and HEP. So that was a migrant program really designed for anyone sixteen and over that didn't have a high school education, to really prepare them to get a GED or to college. So that experience working with migrant students was really key in my life and really important. So with Renee, we worked with the issues of migrant students and really working for the success of migrant students. So that, for me, was really key and critical.

So I think I really saw the Mexican American Education Project Fellows as pioneers and really creating opportunities for us that would follow really very closely afterwards and really created environments that enhanced our success, so they were

the groundbreakers. We came in, we experienced much of the same issues and problems, but we had people there who really welcomed us, who worked with us, who created opportunities for us.

I think one of the other experiences for me was working with José Montoya during Proposition 187. The school was bringing in a number of restaurants for students, and one of the ones they wanted to bring in was Taco Bell, and at that time, Taco Bell was running an ad that said “Run to the border.” But Proposition 187 was saying, obviously, if you ran *this* way, you needed to be removed. And so the stereotypes, the dog, the chihuahua, we were fighting it. So José Montoya, myself, and the head of MEChA, which was Cesar Avila, the three of us fought really hard to tell students, “We do not want Taco Bell. We want a Latino-owned business, *not* Taco Bell.”

We had worked really hard, and the argument on the part of the foundation which was bringing Taco Bell was that “It’s 99 cents. Students are poor, they cannot afford to eat. We need to bring in Taco Bell.”

We had actually done really well, and we had a tie vote on the foundation, which was made up of some faculty and people from the community, and we had a tie vote. We had held a number of forums talking about why Taco Bell was inappropriate for the campus.

At that point, the foundation brought in a very new community member and told him to vote for Taco Bell, and so Taco Bell was brought in.

But, you know, I think we kept up our struggle and we told people, “Okay. It’s here. Don’t use it. Don’t go there.” And I think it didn’t last very long, so it wasn’t profitable for Taco Bell, and Taco Bell would leave.

But as a result of our work, they did make a commitment to bring in ethnically-owned businesses, and so Gorditos would come in as a result of that. So that kind of work that we did was not only for creating better environments for students, really having opportunities in mentoring students, creating environments to enhance the hiring of Chicano/Latino, but also looking at the businesses that were there. Were they culturally appropriate? Were they able to really be responsive to the needs of Chicanos and Latinos on our campus? So again, as I said, I think that they were our pioneers. They were the people that really made things, I think, important for me. So I think probably that speaks to that issue.

Q Did your knowledge of cultural issues influence your involvement and participation in the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:21:42]

Kravitz Oh, yeah, definitely, I think particularly for me. I grew up in San Francisco, and though I moved to Elk Grove, I only knew San Francisco and Elk Grove. We didn’t have money, so we never traveled, we never moved anywhere. But when I became the ethnic services consultant, I traveled the entire state, so I would know this state very well. So one day I’d be in L.A., one day I’d be up in the North, I’d be in the Central Valley, I’d be in the Imperial Valley. You know, I was driving, I was seeing a lot. So I’d be in farm labor camps. I would try to deliver materials to farm labor camps, because I could build grant programs that would be responsive. So

we were trying to build collections for the kids that were in the farm labor camps, but a number of the farm labor camps did not have power after 7:00 p.m., so it was like we were limited. We had to have materials that they could use during the day, not have materials there.

I went to build a library up in the North on an Indian reservation, and we went on the reservation and there were no buildings that could hold collections because they were not structurally able to hold shelving. So wherever I went, I encountered discrimination.

This *rancheria* was called Round Valley. It took me a long time to build consensus and trust with the tribal leaders because they had such negative experiences. When I first went to visit the *rancheria* with the tribal leaders, they took me to a point called Inspiration Point, which is beautiful. You're up in the mountains and you'd see eagles. It just was a beautiful view. But they said, "See this land? This land used to be all of ours. Now we've been pushed to the very most unproductive part of this valley." And there was no ability to really grow anything. The *rancheria* was very poor. Many of the leaders and the residents in the *rancheria* had gone to boarding schools, had really very negative experiences with the White communities and talked about that.

I wanted to build the library then in Covelo, which was the neighboring city, but they said, "Our relationships are really hard. They're really bad." The library had most of its materials on Native peoples, regardless of topic, in the children's section. So that told you a *lot* about the racism and the stereotypes that we had to overcome. We would eventually build a library there and build a collection in Covelo, because I

had no choice. I couldn't build it on the *rancheria*. It still is in existence today, so for me that's an exciting kind of achievement.

But that experience really taught me and showed me very concretely for many peoples of color the types of discrimination that we went through, so it was very, very tough and very hard. So that was an experience that really shaped who I am today and that really commitment to social justice and really undoing and working against discrimination.

But I think when you look at cultural anthropology and its influence on me, Henry Trevon [phonetic] was a faculty member there, and so his work, although I never had him, was really, I think, influential for me because that's where I learned about the importance of speaking out against educational inequalities and empowering Chicanos and Chicanas and people of color as undergraduates. So his work was really key and really important.

I also as a student read R_____, and so his work again became really key for me, because I was really, I think, influenced by his emphasis on history in politics, in the context of inequality and oppression based on class and gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. So those anthropologists became key in my life to looking at how do we deal with oppression, how do we deal with discrimination, how do we work for social justice. So they, I think, led me to really critically understand how power constructs relationships and how it can either subordinate or empower faculty and students and administrators of color.

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

[00:26:17]

Kravitz Well, when I thought about that question, I have to think back, because there's a lot of moments in my life. I think the 1940s was a time of Mexican American civil rights and it was a movement that sought for educational, social, and political equities, so that was a very important movement for me. Again, I learned that in my Ethnic Studies classes; I had *not* learned that in my high school or in elementary.

United Farm Workers, because I had worked in the fields and I had worked in the fields for three, four years, and I was inspired by the work of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta. Having worked in the fields, I told myself, "I need to go to school. I need to get an education." I honor and I love the work of farmworkers, but I felt like I really needed to do something to begin to fight against this oppression in a way that would enable me to have some impact. So for me, the United Farm Workers, which really began organizing in the sixties, '62, was an important part of the *movimiento*.

I was also inspired by the other Civil Rights Movements, so the Black Panthers, the Young Lords were really powerful, the Puerto Rican Young Lords, the Brown Berets and, of course, the Civil Rights Movement was *very* key in my life. The Civil Rights Movement with my grandmother in particular, she was always there in my life saying, "We need to fight against this. We need to make sure that this kind of oppression never is there."

I think what most, though, influenced me were the Chicano walkouts, or the blowouts, as we called them. That was so powerful, 10,000 students walking out. The oppression in the schools was horrific. I think that that curriculum was really

designed to make Chicanos and Latinos really invisible, not speak to who we were. I think the faculty were really conditioning students to be low-wage workers. And we needed to fight, and they did. And so that was *so* powerful. That was that *movimiento* that was there.

In Denver, “Corky” Gonzales was such a critical figure in my life, because ‘69 was the first National Youth Liberation Conference. Again, you see what could be done. You know, here are people organizing, here are people saying, “Enough. *Ya basta*. We’re not going to do this anymore.”

Out of that came the Plan Espiritual de Aztlán, and it became like a framework for the movement. That was *so* powerful. I mean, I was impressed with that. And then you had the Plan de Santa Barbara, and that really powerful. Again, *all* those plans really again began to shape and be part of my life and tell me that this is what we could do, that we need to stand, we need to take action.

In the current movement of Black Lives Matter, Brown Lives Matter, I saw a protest sign that said “Silence is Violence.” I saw that and I thought “Silence is Violence” was really a powerful statement because not to act *is* an action, and the systems of oppression that Chicanos and Latinos faced really needed action. So for me, all of these things that came about, from the 1940s Mexican American Civil Rights to the Black Civil Rights Movements to what was happening to Corky Gonzales, what was happening in Santa Barbara were so critical.

Also in the seventies, NACCS was formed, National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies. That was really key and it was really important. I would become very, very active in NACCS when I came back to California. So I was the head of the

regional Foco, the Northern California Foco, and I also became chair of the national organization.

NACCS also recognized that women really needed to have voice, and so in 1984, there was a conference that was *Voces de la Mujer*, and it was really a hallmark for women and their presence and their voice and said “We *need* to have voice.” So out of that came in an anthology called *Chicana Voices*, so I hope that you will read it. It is so key and so critical and is so powerful for us as women, and it really spoke to Chicana issues and to Chicana Studies in a way that was key and that was important. I think for NACCS, for me, it was really a paradigm of activist scholarship, that scholarship was about being an activist, *not* just being in the academy. So, as I said, I became very active in NACCS, and that was key and that was critical.

I’m thinking what else was really—again, I think this whole time was really critical because we articulated the need to change educational institutions significantly, that the history of Chicanos in the 20th century is one of really legal battles to end segregation, so you could see all the court actions that are there, to implement bilingual and multicultural education that was *so* important for us. Access to education really meant not only the literal access of students in our institutions, but access to a curriculum where Chicano and Chicana history, culture, politics, and identity were essential. So that was what really made me so proud to be a part and working in the *movimiento*.

Q You mentioned the blowouts. Many of the students used the term *Chicano* to identify themselves. How did Mexicans or Mexican Americans and Latinos, in general, react to that term?

[00:32:08]

Kravitz Oh, yeah, that's a controversial term. If my daughter said, "Mom, how do you identify?" I will tell her I identify as Chicana. Then she will go to her *tías* and say, "How do you identify?" And they will all say, "I'm Mexican." They never say, "I'm Mexican American." They say, "I'm Mexican." Then she'll ask others, "How do you identify?" Because when she was young, she was like, "Well, how do people identify?" She could *see* the controversy in it, and why were we all identifying so differently in this movement.

But, for me, the term was political. I am Chicana because I am political. I am Chicana because I'm an activist. I want to reflect on the issues of power, and that is what means. That's why I take the word *Chicana*. So I want people to know that I'm going to act, that I'm going to stand, that I am going to put social consciousness into practice and that I have a cultural and political identity in addition to an ethnic or racial identity, and that's who I am.

So when you ask me how do I identify, I'll tell you very strongly I identify as Chicana. But that speaks to the blowouts and all of the experiences, the working in the fields, the working to say, "I need to be working hard," working through NACCS and watching the women there, and working against *machismo*, against the stereotypes of Chicanas as women.

You know, in my family, my mother expected my brother to go to college. She expected *him* to graduate. My brother tried to go to college, he went one year, and he couldn't do that. He worked on a forklift and did well working in a winery on a forklift, but college was not for him. He could not get through college. Eventually, he would go and he'd work in the post office, and he did well being able to work in the post office.

But for me, my mother had really no understanding of that. I needed to go to college. I needed to make a difference to the community. I needed to give back to the community in a very special way. So that was a clash in my family, that women weren't expected to become college graduates, women weren't expected to go on and become professionals. But now my mother embraces that, but at first, that was very hard. In my house it was very segregated, the duties. I did dishes, I did the cooking, I did the vacuuming. My brother worked out in the yard, my brother worked on the car, my brother did those things, and women didn't do that.

But for my mom, she knew she had a radical, as she would call me [laughter] as a young girl, because I'm always going, "No, I can't do this. I have to do this."

When we worked in the fields, my friends that were Japanese American and I, we decided we need to do something different. Her family were gardeners, so we decided that we were going to become gardeners and we would have our own company. So we created our own company. We took our parents' lawnmowers and we went out and we knocked on doors and said, "We are women gardeners and we will do this and we're going to establish our own business."

So for our senior year in high school, we did. We established a business as women gardeners, and went out and worked and basically actually did kind of well [laughs], showing that we could thrive, that we could be who we wanted to be, that we could have power. In fact, all of us went on to college and all of us became professionals.

So I think that that early experience to saying we need to challenge the situations and expectations that people have of you, you need to have a feeling that you *can* be empowered, you need to have a feeling that you can have high expectations and that with the help of others, with mentors, that you can succeed. So those were experiences that were a part of my life.

So again, you asked me did it change you personally, yeah, it did. But I think all of the experiences from my growing up in a housing project, at that point I never knew I was poor because you're with all of the other kids. I mean, that's your experience. There's no understanding that you are poor until you reflect back on your life. My working in the fields, my going to school, the discrimination I faced when I came back to my college, all of those shaped, I think, who I am, and then, of course, all of the movements that were there, watching the *movimiento* and whatnot, that became really key in my life.

Q You also mentioned the Civil Rights Movement. What does civil rights mean to you as an individual?

[00:36:52]

Kravitz It really means, as an individual, looking at those structures of power and it really begins to say "How are they formulated? How do we fight against those?"

How do we make social justice a key component in our life? How do we make change so that we have equity and equality? How do we make our schools equal? How do we look at the structural environments that create oppression and discrimination? How do we make change and how do we work against those?"

When I look at Civil Rights Movements, I am moved by the people who stand, whether it be Cesar, who did the marches, the boycotts, those became powerful tools to me to say, "We need to make a lot of sacrifices if you're going to work for social justice." So again, that "Silence is Violence" became a sort of an empowering kind of vision for me. You *need* to act; you *need* to walk your talk, and you *need* to be out there, but that means you take a lot of heat and a lot of hardship, but you turn to your mentors and you walk there.

It was interesting, when I left Sac State, I applied for the dean here at Sac City College, in the Learning Resource Center. I knew no one here. I had worked seventeen years at Sac State, so I was familiar with the four-year environment, but not the two-year environment. So when I came, they said, "Well, we'll set you up. We know that David Rasul, so when you go to City, we're going to give you someone who's going to be able to mentor you, who's going to be able to give you an environment that is really positive." So that was really key for me, was to be able to use my mentors, my colleagues to say, "Let us help you, so when you go somewhere else, you will not be alone, you will not be isolated. You will have someone who understands the needs of Chicanas and Chicanos."

And that turned out to be incredibly positive, so wherever I've been with NACCS because it's a national organization, no matter where I've gone and what

states I've been, I've always had people that I could turn to, I've always had folks who would be there and stand with me when you have crisis. It's so important to build those social networks. So civil rights is also building those social networks to kind of protect yourself and also to build solidarity, to build a movement that really is key.

Q You said before that the *movimiento* did change you. How did it change you?

[00:39:26]

Kravitz I think for me it focused my activism. It focused what I was going to do. When I was growing up in high school, I had no idea what I was going to be. As I said, I didn't even know I could go to college or that I wanted to go to college. So the *movimiento* really gave me purpose, it gave me a sense of being, it gave me a sense of knowledge that you *can* act and you *can* make a difference and you can work.

I think a lot of the issues, though, sadly, that we worked for in the sixties and seventies and eighties are still issues today, and that is sad for me. But I tell students never to give up, that that's what we keep doing, we keep fighting, we keep working. I see so many of us retiring. I just retired, David Rasul retired, but I don't see us being replaced. So the issues of hiring a really culturally sensitive faculty is still key and important and perhaps even more so now.

So for you as young women, I think you have a lot ahead of you, but you've got a lot of warriors in the field who are there and willing to let you know how to do things. I remember when I used to work with Isabel when I first arrived, we had AME, as I said, the Association of Mexican American Educators, and we had the

Chicano/Latino Faculty and Staff. We were involved in both of them, but we kept the organization separate purposely, so that one was *very* political and that one took a very strong stance and one took a more moderate stance. So when we were fighting for things, if we wanted a particular view to get really heard and listened to, we would use AME as a very progressive organization to really speak over here, because we knew people couldn't hear this view, but now they would be able to hear this what we called a moderate view, which many would have considered maybe a more radical perspective.

Isabel taught me how to politically shape points of view, how to get what you needed, how to really fight in ways that would be effective. So I think as you move, you know, we've had a lot of political fighting that we've done, we've learned a lot, and so we can help in some ways and we hope we can help in some ways and we hope we can be there to at least to say that your struggles are not unique. Your struggles had been struggles, unfortunately, of the ages. But I always have hope. I always feel like we will get there.

Q What roles do you believe that Chicanas had in the *movimiento*?

[00:42:04]

Kravitz Oh, my gosh! You know, I think Chicana—my heart. As I say, I'm Chicana. I think that Chicanas really, I think, looked at the relationships between what was happening in the Chicana Movement and the American Feminist Movement during the sixties and seventies. So there was really, like, a crisis for us in many ways. The White Feminist Movement didn't really understand who we were culturally, who we were ethnically, what were the class interests of Chicanas. So that

movement came about, and I think we were really compelled to have that dialogue between the White feminists and what we stood for as Chicanas.

I think we also had integrated the eradication of patriarchy in the Chicana male community within a struggle of race and class domination, so that was a dialogue that I think we really needed to have and were really willing to have. I think what was really important for me as Chicanas was that we acknowledge the dominance of males in society as a whole, as well as the history of discrimination and the neglect of women both in the home and in the workplace, and I think that was really key. I think Chicanas really challenged the stereotypes of women across the lens of gender, ethnicity, class, race, and sexuality, and so their work was so powerful.

I think one of the really neat things that happened in '82, and it was before I came here, but my friends that were working in California would tell me, "You need to understand and know what NACCS is." Because in '82 they held a conference, and out of their work came a collective voice of women that was so critical and so important. In one of their anthologies they wrote—and I wrote it down because I've always loved this—"Our history is the history of working-class people, their struggles, their commitments, their strengths, and the Chicano/Mexicano experience in the U.S. We are particularly concerned with the conditions that women face at work in and out of the home. We continue our mothers' struggles for economic and social justice, and the scarcity of Chicanas in institutions of higher education requires that we join together to identify our common problems, to support each other and really to define collective solutions." And that's what I felt we as Chicanas were

doing, is working together to defy those collective institutions and really identifying what we called institutional violence. That was '82 and '83.

Today I'm working with women at UCD and at Woodland Community College on institutional violence against Chicanas in both of those institutions, so there's still so much work that needs to be done. So I'm working with NACCS to really write a letter to the Woodland Community College district on what it is doing to a Chicana there at Woodland Community College, and that we speak out against the oppression and institutional racism and violence that our Chicanas as faculty experience today.

Q So you were talking about the Chicanas and how they pushed. What about you personally? What did you help or what did you initiate within that movement?

[00:45:28]

Kravitz Well, as I said, I was really active in NACCS and so I've always been active in the Foco, so we push *a lot* of issues. I also became chair of NACCS, and I worked together with not just our Foco here in California. There are regional Focos across the U.S., and so we work together to address these issues. We hold an annual conference every year, we work with students across, and do a lot of work to mentor students, so that is key for the work that I do.

I've retired in October, but I have written, I think, twenty-five letters of references for students who continue to write me and ask me for references as they go on to work on their Ph.D.s. I continue to mentor and work with students who are now applying for jobs as faculty members, so I'm so excited to see that. I have a number

of Chicana students that are at the University of Utah working and doing some really key and critical work that speaks to the Chicana experience, and they want to come back and they want to teach here, and I can see them as mentors. And particularly their work with women is so powerful, so I'm hoping that that work—we just continue working. You build seeds and those seeds grow, so the *semillas* are really critical to our ongoing work, and you garden all the time, if I can use that metaphor, and things grow and things sometimes don't grow, but you work again to get things to grow. I don't know. I hope that answers that.

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

[00:47:09]

Kravitz Yeah, you probably have seen and heard that. Yeah, substantially. And I still see it and I still do that. I still tell students—and I work with faculty—that we need to keep addressing these issues. I think for me, working at Los Rios and seeing we had an opportunity to hire, as a chancellor, an *incredible* Chicano person who worked as a president in one of our campuses, Francisco Rodriguez. Received his doctorate, inspirational, could have done bicultural, bilingual, really understood not only Chicanos and Latinos, but people of color, understood the systems of oppression, knew what it takes to really make a difference in the lives of students. We had an opportunity to do that, and we didn't do that. So we need to keep working on that.

I'm really concerned and I'm working with NACCS now, the local Foco, to look at what is happening in community colleges now that we've passed student

success laws. Those student success laws say we need to move people faster through the community colleges, but I think they don't hold the campuses accountable in the way that they need to be held accountable, so the people that suffer are the students. If you come in as a developmental student with remedial needs and you take a math class three times, you're out. Now, the college is not penalized for creating structural and systemic environments that do not enhance the success, but it is the *student* that is ultimately penalized.

So I think the new legislation is devastating for students of color. So as a Foco, we are going to begin speaking. We're actually drafting a letter right now that we're going to send to the state chancellor, and we want to meet with the state chancellor, we want to talk about these laws and what they have done. There are policies that go into the legislation, they became law. So we want to see some changes. We want to see that institutions are held accountable and that students are able to succeed, but not lose out.

So now if you fail this math class three times, you're out of Los Rios. You have to go to Delta, you have to go to Stanislaus, you have to go elsewhere, or Sierra, anywhere, but you cannot be here, Solano Community College. You cannot retake that here. So what are we saying to students when we know that too many Latino students are not graduating? We know that they start here but they are not graduating. So that is really something that we're also working on. So, yes, I keep working on these issues, these very issues at my heart.

Q So how did these changes impact you personally?

[00:49:50]

Kravitz Personally?

Q Like along the lines of family and peers.

[00:49:54]

Kravitz With peers, I think my peers are like-minded. I mean, I think you choose like-minded peers, so I see that really I've developed a lot of relationships with folks in the Latino and Chicano educational communities who are really deeply committed to making change, fundamental change.

And my family? At first, my family had a really hard time understanding what I was doing, but now that is not the case. Now they are on my side. Now, although I have a very, very large extended family, very few of us go on to college, so I'm really working to enhance the success rates for my family, and they look to me as a role model, as a mentor. So it's really evolved, and so we're working on that.

In my own family, now my husband has a Ph.D., I have a doctorate in public administration, and my daughter will have a Ph.D. in sociology. So the three of us will all have doctorates. That has served as a really powerful role model to my family members who say, "We can do this too." So for me, it's been exciting to see that and let my family members know, "Yes, you, too, can go to college. You, too, can succeed. But you need to reach out. You can't do this by yourself. You need to have help."

Q So the Movimiento Chicano has shaped your career and what you have discussed about. You also mentioned in the beginning that there are some issues that still haven't been solved. What are those issues that you are talking about?

[00:51:29]

Kravitz I think we grapple with the failures of the public education system. Too many Chicanas and Chicanos are not graduating from high school. We have, I think, the lowest graduation in the state of California. We have the highest rate of segregation for Latinos in the state of California. That is *unacceptable*. Those changes are changes that we need to work on. Our college graduation rates are really low for Latinos. We need enhance those. We're the fastest ethnic group in the country that is growing, yet we continue to perpetuate social relations of dominance and subordination for Latino students. That, for me, is unacceptable.

Something like 40 percent of Latinos over nineteen do not have a high school diploma, so that's an issue for me. That is something we need to work on. I say to my students, "We cannot sustain apartheid in our schools. We have segregated schools. We cannot do that. We need to make change."

I also work with the immigrant population, undocumented immigrant, and I want to change the language. I don't want to call my students (un)DOCUMENTED; I call them (un)DOCUSCHOLARS. I want you to see them in a positive way. I want us to create (un)DOCUFRIENDLY campuses. I want you to see them as clearly a key part of the life of the U.S.

I'm working on comprehensive immigration reform for the 11.2 million people in the U.S. today. And if you look, you know, our immigrant community has lived here mainly twelve years or longer. They have been giving and have been an important contribution to life of the U.S. and to California and to our schools, yet they face on a daily basis *so* much discrimination. In terms of financial aid, oftentimes financial aid is unknown to them or the Financial Aid offices give out incorrect

information. We oftentimes here had students who would go to the Financial Aid office and say, "I'm an AB 540 student."

And they would say, "Well, what's that?" We had administrators who did not know what AB 540 was, and yet it's been in existence since 2001.

We had an administrator who did not even know who Dolores Huerta was when we brought her as a keynote speaker a year ago. That is unacceptable. There is *so much work* that we need to do in our schools.

I also work for Healthcare For All in Sacramento. In 2009, the county of Sacramento removed healthcare to the undocumented. That was unacceptable. So now I work with a consortium of activists and we're working to restore healthcare to the undocumented. We are preparing a rally in July and preparing a human rights statement to really speak to the needs of the undocumented and why we need to restore those rights. At this rally, we want to talk about that the undocumented can give blood, you can give organs, but you can't get medical care? So we want to talk about what is being done, what the contributions of the undocumented are, and yet why we create such horrific environments for them.

I've seen too many Bilingual/Bicultural Education Programs have gone by the wayside. We do not have Ethnic Studies in our P-through-12, preschool-through-12 environments. I want to see that restored. I want to see that commitment to Ethnic Studies program.

I mean, I could go on and on and on about what we did. [laughter] But I want to say to people that we need to remain active, we need to walk our talk, we need to take initiative. I think we need to say that our Chicana identity, our ideologies, our

activism needs to be a daily conscious practice, that we need to act always purposely, we need to act reflectively, and we need to come together in terms of social justice.

Q Can you describe a little bit how the Movimiento Chicano impacted your community life, like whether in Sacramento or where you were raised?

[00:55:39]

Kravitz Yeah, definitely. It doesn't matter where I am, I'm always going to get involved. I'll find out where the Latino community is. I'll find out what some of those issues are. I will see what I can do, what I can offer. Like here in Sacramento, right now I'm working—I mean I'm retired, but I'm really working with the undocumented community and really creating opportunities and change.

I testified before the Assembly for AB 1366 on creating DREAM Resource Centers across the U.S. in all of our colleges, community colleges, our four-year institutions, our UCs, that they are critically needed to talk about what happens to our students and the misinformation they receive, and to really create positive environments for our (un)DOCUSCHOLARS. So that's what I'm doing right now, but I will always look for what is going on. There are so many issues that really we can join in and we can work in. So it's really not a matter of finding issues; it's about us saying, "What can I do? Where do I need put limits on myself in order to say 'Wait. I need to take a breath here and there.'"

Q So, unfortunately, many of the Chicanos that participated in the movement have passed away, but can you identify an individual or individuals that made an impact within that movement?

[00:56:57]

Kravitz That have passed away? José Montoya. Oh, that was such a sad, hard moment for me when José died. As I said, when I went to Sac State as a professor, José became one of my mentors. José and I fought on many issues. His artwork was so key and critical to addressing the political environment that we experience as Chicanas and Chicanos. His poetry, oh, my gosh, his poetry was alive and so key and critical on so many artistic levels. José was a part of our life.

He asked me to help him when he became the poet laureate for Sacramento, such an honorable position, to do his celebration at the end of the year, and he brought all these people that immediately wanted to come and celebrate José's poetry and his life and his experiences as poet laureate in Sacramento. That experience was so powerful for me. I mean, he engaged and really taught me how to hear and to listen and to be active, so his life will always remain with me. I mean, he'll always be a part of my life. He's not here. So I speak to José as one of those people that really—I mean, it still hurts. It's still very painful. But yet he lives within me and his activism lives within me and his spirit lives within me. He gave me so much.

Q Thank you. As you said before, you say that there's a lot of challenges that are in the community. What is, like, one challenge you think needs to change for the future generations of Chicanos?

[00:58:38]

Kravitz Well, that's creating educational systems of equality. We really need to make sure that we don't have our Latino students facing the systems of oppression that they still face. I want our students to have bilingual, bicultural experiences in their schools when they start in preschool through when they go through their

graduate levels, their Ph.D. levels, whatever they go to. They deserve to have an opportunity to really have the same educational environments. We do not have that environment yet. So I think that is still a challenge for Chicana and Chicano students and still one that we need to fight. We still need to fight for when you go and enter a college classroom that you're going to be able to see Chicano and Latino faculty and staff. You may see staff at a greater level, but you don't see a number of Chicano and Chicana faculty or administrators at the levels that I think we need to. So we need to do a lot of recruitment, retention, and promotion of our Chicanas and Chicanos.

Q As you said before, you always look to see if there's a Chicano community. How long do you think you'll be staying involved into it?

[00:59:52]

Kravitz I think that with José or whatever, when you're an activist, you say, "I'm going to walk that talk and I'll walk that talk until the day I die." This is my life. This is who I am. Social justice is what I'm about. That's my consciousness. That's what my life is about. So, yes, you just don't take that away. Dolores Huerta, you'll never see her not being Dolores Huerta. I think when we asked her to be the keynote speaker for our Chicano grad, we called the Dolores Huerta Foundation and said, "Okay, how does she want to get here?"

They said, "Well, can you pay her transportation?"

We said, "Of course, of course." And we said, "We'll fly her."

They go, "Oh, no, she doesn't want to fly. She lives in Bakersfield. She'll take the train and she can work on the train. Then she'll get to Stockton and she'll get on the bus."

And we go, “And she’ll get on the bus, too? She’s eighty-four years old and she’s going to do all this?”

And they, “Oh, no, she loves doing this.”

And we said, “Well, no. She can take the train and work on the train. We’ll pick her up in Stockton.”

When one of our colleagues picked her up in Stockton, she told Carmen, “Oh, but I need to go over here and here because I have some work over here.” So she had Carmen take her and do a little bit of political work over there, then came back over here and delivered this *incredible* talk to our Chicano/Latino graduation ceremony, and I think that talk was so incredible because she would first talk to the students, so she’d turn her back to the audience, talk to the students in English, then she’d turn to the audience and talked in Spanish only, with recognition of who was in that audience. I thought that was so powerful. I mean, eighty-four. She will *never* stop being Dolores Huerta and never stop being that social justice advocate. She will always work for change. She is my role model. I hope that that will be me at 84, 95, 110, however long I live. I mean, those are my role models. Those are the people that move me and inspire me to such levels of ability to do things. I think you have to have high aspirations in your life, and you use those role models and mentors to really keep you going.

Q Thank you. Thank you so much.

[01:02:05]

Kravitz Okay. I hope that’s enough.

[End of interview]