

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

Phillip Rios

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Angela Alfaro and Alejandro Mendoza
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Transcription by Austin Raffi Hrechdakian and Technitype Transcripts

Alfaro Can you give me your full name, please?

[00:00:09]

Rios Phillip Rios.

Alfaro And then your birthdate?

[00:00:12]

Rios September 6, 1947.

Alfaro Are you married?

[00:00:15]

Rios Yes.

Alfaro Do you have any children?

[00:00:18]

Rios Yes.

Alfaro How many and ages?

[00:00:20]

Rios I've been divorced three times, married total four. I have a daughter from my first marriage; she was born in 1966. I have a daughter from my second

marriage; she's about thirty-eight. Renee Noel, first daughter; Monique Destiny, second daughter.

Mendoza Now we're going to move on to questions about your early life. Where were you born and raised?

[00:00:51]

Rios I was born and raised Sacramento, California, and I take care of my mom. She's ninety-five years old. She's going to be ninety-six this Thursday, and she lives in the same house I was born in, 14th Avenue.

Mendoza What did your parents do for a living?

[00:01:11]

Rios My dad was a millwright and warehouseman at the rice mill, Local 17. My mom was a housewife. She had eleven kids, so she was constantly taking care of us.

Mendoza How many brothers and sisters do you have?

[00:01:33]

Rios Seven brothers, four sisters.

Mendoza Can you please describe your experiences as a child and youth in your family and neighborhood?

[00:01:42]

Rios At that time, if you were Mexican and you were born in Southside Park, you could not get out of Southside Park. The banks would not loan you the money. The real estate agents would not sell you the house, and they had actual written contracts that forbid homeowners to sell to Mexicans, Jews, Blacks, Chinese.

It was in writing and it was sanctioned by the county too. So if you were Mexican and you were born in Southside Park, you could not get out of Southside Park, just like if you were Black, you couldn't get out of Del Paso Heights or Oak Park.

My father was a veteran and he happened to get a VA loan. He was light-skinned. He look like George Raft, Anthony Quinn, and I guess he slipped through the cracks and he got a house in a predominantly White neighborhood on 14th Avenue, which is close to Hiram Johnson [High School], and we were the only Mexican family in that area and we had eleven kids. It was a two-bedroom house. It wasn't traumatic, but it was pretty crowded. We had four to a bed, two bunkbeds. The girls had their own room. All the sons were cramped into one. But it was happy. My dad was a good man, he was a good man, smart, intelligent. My mom was—they were together, hard workers.

Alfaro So we're going to move on from your early life into part of the Mexican American Education Project. Were you a Fellow or a Felito?

[00:03:40]

Rios Back when?

Alfaro Back during the Mexican American Education Project.

[00:03:45]

Rios Yes.

Alfaro So can you elaborate on that and how did that go?

[00:03:49]

Rios How did that go? I never got to the degree of Brown Beret, but I was a radical activist. I started out as kind of an innocent high school student, then I got into

college. I went to City College, I came here, '67 '68, and as Vietnam progressed horribly, I was educated to become against the war and I was involved in anti-war demonstrations.

At the same time, Cesar Chavez was needing help, and I helped. I played guitar, so I would go out to Lucky's and I played guitar, *De Colores*. At that time, I had a good job, post office, and I would see the farmworkers, the *campesinos*, come in, and I felt kind of awkward because I had a good job with benefits, and they were suffering and struggling against the farm owners. and it was brutal. Down in Kern County, the news coverage didn't cover it, but the sheriffs down there in Kern County, they were brutal.

I helped with the march. I never met Cesar Chavez personally. I saw the back of his head. [laughs] I was like about 50 yards, 100 meters. There was just too much security. But activists, Lucky Markets, all the markets that we were boycotting were being boycotted by the grapes. My wife and I, we're divorced now, but we supported that. We would picket and I'd play guitar. She would provide cookies or food. Sometimes they had nowhere to sleep, and we'd have a couple crash out at our house. It was exciting. It was changing times.

Then from there, at different times I'd go to anti-Vietnam marches, and I never, never got violent, never got disrespectful to the troops. I wasn't involved directly yet with RCAF, Royal Chicano Air Force. I wasn't involved with them yet, but I protested and I marched against Vietnam.

Then I was drafted. I thought about going to Canada. I thought about burning my draft card, doing time. Two of my college students here, they burned their draft

card out by the cafeteria, and they ended doing five years in federal prison. They burned their draft card; they resisted. I thought twice about that. I was married at the time. I had a job, a federal job. Prison seemed pretty extreme, but I was still against the war.

I thought about going to Canada. At that time, they had shuttles, they had vans that would take students, Oregon State, UCLA, USC. They would coordinate like an underground railroad and they would take students into Canada, and they would have arrangements to have them stay in accommodations for the students who wanted to resist the draft. That also was kind of extreme, because you go to Canada, now you're in exile. You can't come back. So I considered those two options.

My last option was to go to Oakland Induction Center and go to the physical. A friend of mine, college student, mentioned that he tried to join earlier and they kicked him out because he was flat feet. Well, I was flat feet, so figured I'd go down to Oakland and I'd get 4F, rejected, on Saturday, and come back Monday and we'd have pizza, smoke some stuff. [laughs]

So it didn't happen. I was flat feet and they still passed me as 1A, and I ended up in the Army and they made me an MP. I was against the war then, I was against that war now. I never did support it, but that's the one time I went against my principles. That's the one time, and I had never felt comfortable.

The one reason that put me to Oakland to go along with that war machine was my father, he was in World War II, he was a gunner's mate, U.S. Navy. He saw some brutal action in South Pacific. He's my hero. I could not disrespect the family name. I could not do that to him. So I did what I didn't want to do for my father.

I was in the Army two years, twenty-six days, twelve hours, five minutes, and I came back shredded. I was not able to return to City College. I was not the man that my wife kissed goodbye. A lot of guys weren't. They came back trashed, could not imagine. I went from being a long-haired hippie, "Let's make war peace," and within fourteen months, I had brutalized prisoners in the worst way possible to get the answer that I needed to get, because there was no one to stop me. I was the MP. I was the authority. And I got decorated for what I did. Back in California, I would get twenty-five years in Folsom. So it was disgusting. I'm saying this now because the statute of limitations is over. But war is unhealthy for people.

I'm not sure if I answered your question.

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

[00:10:46]

Rios Well, I might say something that might not be comfortable with people. I saw two aspects of oppression. One was the White male-dominated political party, the banking system. They had a grab of the finances, and the job opportunities were Mexicans and Negroes and Asians—not so much Asians, but Mexicans and Blacks were eliminated from the employment opportunities. That was controlled by the *gabachos*. Control. Housing was controlled.

Another object of oppression that I saw was the Catholic Church. I see these people pray and pray and pray, and I saw the church, inside the church was all this stuff color with gold, filled with gold, and I saw the church take, take, take from the Mexicanos, and I saw Mexicanos live in poverty.

Now, I had a good federal job. So when I was a kid at eight years old, I did go to the fields with my brothers and we had to pick tomatoes to get additional money. So I learned that the people in the fields, I'd get on a truck and come back home at 6:00, 7:00, then I'd go to my home, but the *campesinos* in the fields, they had horrible conditions to live in. And that educated me that I wanted to do something to improve their life.

My father was politically active and he was brilliant. I didn't realize that at the time, but later on, he made his efforts to help elect the first lieutenant governor Mexican American, Roybal, Edward Roybal, in 1955. And because of seeing my father was doing, he would say, "If you don't vote to change the system, shut up. If you don't get involved in the election process of the democracy, then you have no beef." I would see him work at the State Capitol. He was a warehouseman, he was a laborer, he worked at the rice mill, he worked at the ports, but his head was political savvy. My dad ended up the campaign manager for Roybal when he ran for Congress in 1962, and he won, and Roybal was the first Mexicano in that district in L.A. to be congressmen, and his daughter is now in that seat. So I saw how successful it was if you campaign together through the peaceful process of election. When I was young, I saw the violence of frustration, you know, the change. If you're violent, then you've got to contend with the law enforcement, and they'll come down on you hard. So I learned a lot from my father.

I saw how the Mexicanos were struggling. I was not in Southside. My relatives were, my cousins my uncles, my aunts. They were stuck in Southside Park, they were stuck in that area, cockroaches, rats. I felt kind of bad that I had a decent

life. My father had a decent job. We had a stable home life. My mother would cook a different meal every day. My dad was a provider and my mom was a homemaker, pretty much stable. Then my cousins would be over here. Seavey Circle was the projects.

I became a champion of causes. They called me champion of causes. I wanted to help improve, either improve or help get the laws changed.

I'm not sure if I answered your question.

Alfaro So these issues that you're talking about, that you experienced, how did they influence your involvement and participation in the Chicano Movement?

[00:15:40]

Rios It's never-ending. It's never-ending desire. Like today. I'm working with a good commander, Fred Romero. Members of the Royal Chicano Air Force who are Vietnam vets are members of American GI Forum. A lot of folks don't know what it is, who it is, how it started, the American GI Forum. We started a chapter, Cesar E. Chavez. A lot of folks don't know the chapter exists. That's part of our efforts is to educate our history, who we are, what we are, what we do. Today the activity was to recognize and honor those in helping scholarships for Latino/Latinas continue to college, get to college, and educate. Our theme is "Education is Everyone's Freedom," and it's very important for us the younger generation makes that progression through education, that they never have to experience what we did growing up, the discrimination, the bias, stuff like that. But by the same token, it's important that the younger generation is educated what has happened in the past, what

was there in the past, the monsters, the oppression that no longer exists, because they can come back if you don't pay attention.

Mendoza Can you please explain your perspective and how it influenced your understanding and participation in the Movimiento Chicano?

[00:17:28]

Rios I learned from my father pride back in the sixties, fifties, sixties, pride to be Chicano. At that time, a lot of Mexicanos were ashamed. They were ashamed, tacked on, and that was by the *Leave it to Beaver*, only the *gabachos* have that kind of house, that kind of living, that kind of lifestyle, only they are entitled to that kind of stuff. Then again, a lot of Mexicanos, like I say, were trapped in Southside Park. It's typical to have hope when you are trapped and you know you're trapped, but I saw, thanks to my father, I saw a different perspective of his pride. He was respected for what he did on his job. I can't speak well enough of my dad. There was integrity, pride, history. My mom has history, her roots. My grandma Bonita, I learned her education, who she was, where she came from, all the way back to my great-grandmother. Because I knew my history and I was rooted in that foundation in my history, I didn't have any shame. I had pride.

Growing up as a teenager, that did irk people. I was in an all-White neighborhood. So here's this uppity Mexican. My father made a point not to speak Spanish in the house, because he was beaten—when he came across, he was beaten because he spoke Spanish, and then in junior high, he was beaten because he had an accent. He finally got rid of his accent in high school. So when we were born, he made a point not to speak Spanish in the house so that we wouldn't have accents. And

that's a double-edged sword, because I couldn't speak to my cousins when I came to Seavey Circle. They spoke English, but I couldn't speak fluent, but that was an embarrassment to me. But outside of that, there was pride, there was connection, there was continuity. Even though I had a good federal job, I related just as much to the *campesinos* because I had worked in the fields. I was fortunate that I was not trapped and stuck *in* fields. I was going to high school, I got an education, I landed a federal job, but I never forgot about what they had to endure. For me, I felt pride, then and now.

Alfaro So do you have any other memories of events that attracted you to the Chicano Movement?

[00:21:21]

Rios Memories. In chronological order?

Alfaro Sure.

[00:21:34]

Rios I was an anti-war protester and then I got drafted. [laughs] I did not go into Vietnam. I was made an MP. I did not go serve in-country Vietnam, but I transported AWOLs from Fort Lewis, Washington, as an MP prisoner escort. I flew AWOLs to Vietnam, dropped them off, and came back to Fort Lewis, or I'd drop off AWOLs and then they would bring in prisoners, American military who had committed serious crimes, and I would fly them back to Fort Lewis court-martial. Then I'd fly them to Leavenworth to serve twenty years to life. But I never served thirteen months *in* Vietnam. I'd just like drop them off, temporary duty, six hours and

come back. So that's the difference between a Vietnam era and a Vietnam veteran. Vietnam era is you may have touched ground, but you didn't serve in country.

When I came back in '72—I mentioned I was a protester earlier. When I came back, I was still kind of indifferent as a veteran, but when I came back in '72, I got spit on by a college student, long-haired college student, and I kind of [demonstrates] turned my attitude to become a veteran. I was highly upset. I could use a different word [laughs], but I'll say highly upset.

Then I learned about the Royal Chicano Air Force. They had a meeting area on Folsom Boulevard by Phillip's Bakery, 34th Street and Folsom Boulevard. It was a little bigger than this [demonstrates], and they had different things going on there, arts and crafts. Juanish [Juanishi]. You know Juanish [Orosco]? Wow. Juanish. Do you know the mural you go from Macy's to Old Sacramento? Have you ever gone from Macy's to Old Sacramento, and there's like a tunnel?

Mendoza No.

[00:24:10]

Rios He did it, Juanish. I saw him. He's a member of American GI Forum. Juanish, he went to Vietnam. David Rasul. You know David, David Rasul?

Mendoza No.

[00:24:25]

Rios He was a member of Royal Chicano Air Force. He went to Vietnam, he was an MP *in* Vietnam. He's a combat vet. He was the dean of counseling at City College. He came from Sac State. He's retired now, but he was dean of counseling

here, and he has kind of given me the incentive to return to City College, to enroll, to finish my credits to get my AA, because I was halfway there when I got drafted.

So I became aware of RCAF and I joined. José Montoya. You know José Montoya? José Montoya was a professor at Sac State. He basically founded Royal Chicano Air Force. He's internationally known, nationwide known, and he passed away last year and we had a very elaborate memorial at the Crest Theater for him. All these old-timers came out. I hadn't seen these guys in years, Armando Cid, David Rasul, Juanish. These guys were artists, elaborate artists.

I did pen-and-ink, and I'm preparing for an exhibit myself. I'm getting back into art because my creativity is coming back. I was going to say I play guitar and I talk to little kids, *De Colores*, and I taught them different songs, *Las Mañanitas*. And then we had a little course for the kids and then there'd be different things, arts and crafts, literature.

Melinda [Rasul]—David married Melinda—and Armando Cid. At that time, there were revolutionary Mexican artists in Sacramento in that room, and what they did is they created a lot of artwork for Cesar Chavez. They would go down there to Kern County or go down to Delano, and as far as I know, they would create the shirts, these really nice designs, “Viva Huelga!” and the t-shirts. They would create those items. I didn't do that. I didn't do that, but they did. They'd do fundraisers and they also had a theatre group which exists now, and there's a theatre group telling the life story of the brutality of the Kern County sheriff and of the *campesinos* and their lifestyle. It was exciting at that time.

Being under RCAF in 1972, '73, '74, Sacramento City Police had an open hostile attitude towards the Mexicanos in Southside Park. In '72—correct me if I'm wrong; he's [demonstrates] my memory—in '72, there was an anti-war demonstration, Chicano Power Against Vietnam, because the highest percentage of minorities killed in Vietnam, fighting in the war that was not justified, was Mexicanos in California, 10 percent. That's a lot of Mexicanos. And when they come back from the war, they're not treated properly, so what's the point? So they had an anti-war demonstration in L.A. in '72, and there was a very popular reporter [Ruben Salazar] who was writing stories about the actual brutality of police in the East L.A. Boyle Heights area, and he was killed. Some say he was killed by the police on purpose. It can't be proven, but they had an inquest.

There's a lot of brutality from the law enforcement in L.A., but there was also an open hostility of the police against Mexicanos. In '74, '75, being part of the RCAF, I proposed the idea to go to the police as a group, to the city police, to the chief of police. I was an MP, I had the training, and I rounded up about ten other Vietnam vets who were MPs, and we proposed that we were going to monitor ourselves and keep the police out of the park, keep them out of Southside Park. And they agreed, thinking we were going to flop.

So we had to select the people who were going to go, because we don't want to flare up on our own stuff. So we selected the people who had the experience and control and how to do it. Then we asked the public ahead of time, "Please don't be stupid, because they're waiting."

So the police promised not to come in the park, and we monitored ourselves. We had armbands. I forget what design we had, but it was peace. We had armbands. All of us had past law enforcement experience. Everything was going good, and then later on, I found out that the police had two or three vans or paddy wagons four blocks—here's the Guadalupe Church [demonstrates]. They had three blocks around the corner in an alley out of sight, just waiting, they had the riot gear, they had the batons. They were just waiting for some—they wanted some blood, and they were waiting for us to get out of hand.

Everything was peaceful until the last hour some idiot got drunk and was arguing over some girlfriend, and he started an altercation and he hit one of the security guys. I think it was me. But I think the police did not come into the park. That was kind of exhausting.

And then I think I tried to do it again, but I was getting lost behind my own drinking. I drank heavy, because I had nightmares from Vietnam—from what I did, not Vietnam. But I didn't like what I did, I didn't like who I was when I came back.

That was one of the major things accomplishments I did, was talking to the police and I presented myself in a way that they would even consider the idea. Then I collected ten guys. I think maybe David was one of the MPs, but each one of us, we convinced the police we could do it, and it was done. It was a peaceful, nice celebration. I never enjoyed it because I was walking around looking for trouble. I missed the whole thing. [laughs] I missed the music, the mariachis, everything. I was just hoping nothing would explode. I think I was exhausted.

After that, I started getting lost behind my drinking and nightmares, and then I dropped out of RCAF. I lost contact and I just got more into—I started losing my job. I lost my wife, lost a house. I got my job back.

I went to Mi Casa. That was the first year Mi Casa was open. Have you ever heard of Mi Casa? My counselor was Rene, and he tore me a new one. [Spanish], this and that. I was getting lost behind the bottle. I was in the halfway house, Mi Casa, on 47th Avenue. That was the first year it opened? No, second year it opened up, and I got in there, and I was working with the post office still, and they had a program through PAR, Program Alcoholic Recovery, which is good. If they wanted to save the employee, they sent the employee there. If the employee was not worth saving [demonstrates], they'd fire him or her. I went in there and had to get real.

Then I came out, and I was supposed to go to AA. I couldn't handle AA because it was just full of *gabachos*, just 99 percent. I didn't trust them when I was drinking, I'm not going to trust them when I'm sober, trying to recover. I went to this meeting and I had nothing to say, and these two guys stand up to me and they say, well, they recommend me to go to the Spanish-speaking meeting, because I sat there for like about two months and I didn't say a word. "I have nothing to say to you." So I just sat there in the meeting, I said nothing. They assumed that I couldn't speak English. So I told them very clear in words where to go, that I could speak *really* good English. [laughs]

I became aware and then went to the VA in San Francisco to reach out for my drinking problem. I lost a good woman as a wife. Then I kind of fell off the radar for community service. I was just treading water. A disaster happened in '78, an act of

serious violence, and I got into AA through the court. I was on probation, I went to court, and I got into AA for real, 1980.

Let's see. There's other activities I did that I should've wrote them down. Galleria Posada, you're aware of that? You know about that. Originally, that was on 10th Street. And Concilio. My cousin Lupe, she was director. The Concilio was doing a lot of activities to help the community. I'm not sure how that collapsed, but it was internal strife and bickering and some funding. What I've seen was the Concilio was doing outreach, doing lot of programs for the local populace, Latinos.

Then I started seeing the Catholic Church not being so much the oppressor as helping the *campesinos* and start helping in other aspects. When I was young, I was kind of like hostile. The priests were all White. When I got married, my wife was second-generation German. I knew her in high school, and we saw each other as people. She saw me as a good artist, and she helped me in geometry. That's how we meant. She helped with a problem. I couldn't figure it out and she helped me figure it.

But when we got married, we went down the St. Peter's. You know where St. Peter's is at? It's a Catholic Church on McMahon Drive off of Fruitridge Road. The priest pulls her aside and gives her a lecture about "Why do you want to intermingle? Why do you want to mix your blood? Why do you want to marry this Mexican?" This is a Catholic priest. And then she told me—she was converting to become a Catholic—and she was shocked. I said, "Well, I'll tell you what. Up yours."

So we went to St. Rose's, and the priest married us at St. Rose's. You know where St. Rose's is at? You go to church? [laughs]

Alfaro A little bit.

[00:37:42]

Rios The racism in that Catholic priest at McMahon Drive, St. Peter's, I wasn't surprised, but my wife, being kind of like an innocent *gabacha*, never saw this. She never heard of it. Her parents told her to love everybody, like the Bible, but when she did it, her parents were upset because then when she brought me home and they saw—they heard me talk on the phone, but when she brought me home for dinner, it was like that movie *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. The taco vender, the wetback, the spick. Because her parents, her mom was from Oklahoma and her dad was from North Dakota, and all they saw was a tomato picker. It was bad in those days, and I'm glad you folks never see it. I hope maybe not. But that's what they called us. In the neighborhood where I lived, where I grew up, the Fritzes, the Mackenzies, the Jacksons, the Manharts, the Mexicans. That's how they called us. To this day, I want to just help improve the image and let the people know that education is the way out.

Alfaro So how about the role of women in the Movimiento? What role do you believe the Chicanas played?

[00:39:21]

Rios The backbone, the backbone, foundation. They keep the family together. They have more courage, they have more strength. I guess that applies to a lot of women, whether you're Korean, Vietnamese, Mexican, Black, White. When push comes to shove, they have the strength and courage to continue on.

My mom, I take care of my mom on Sunday, sometimes Wednesday. She's going to be ninety-six this Thursday. She has Alzheimer's, and I've got to see my

mom deteriorate in front of me. She's well-read. I read because she read. I know about history because I read history books. A lot of time she knows who I am. Sometimes she doesn't know who I am. Sometimes she doesn't even know if the house is hers. Sometimes she is not coherent. But to know how intelligent she was and to know what she did, growing up, we'd come in and she'd have a different meal. I don't know how she did it, but she had *sopa*, beans, *papas*, but to be a different other meal, and eight dozen tortillas, flour tortillas, all day long doing this [demonstrates]. I mean, just constant work and then washing clothes. We had that—you washed clothes in the tumbler. It's like a—what is it? Like a Three Stooges washing machine, like a tumbler. Then when you dry the clothes, you got to put the clothes through two wooden things, and that's how you dry the clothes out. They come out like a [demonstrates] through the two wooden things that get pressed down and squeeze the water out of the clothes, until she finally got a dryer.

My aunt Linda, my aunt Lola, my grandma Bonita, tough cookies, the cornerstone. I've seen a lot of female relatives, the husbands, the boyfriends, they'd come and make their mess and they'd bail out, and then they got to continue on with these kids and struggle to survive. They do the best they can. Or sometimes the guy stays and it's a happy, happy time.

But as far as the Movement, there's one lady I respect. She's just—I don't know where she gets the energy, Juanita Ontiveros. Do you know her? Her office is on 22nd and K. She's the current Northern California education labor rep for United Farm Workers. She walked with Dolores Huerta. You know Dolores? She walked with Dolores and Cesar and Helen [Chavez]. She's still working in Yolo County to

help the farmworkers and the kids. The Yolo County School Board is somehow messing with the kids' education, transportation. I don't know the particulars, but she's still there for the next generation.

When Cesar passed away, he was not honored with a military ceremony. Why, I don't know, but about two weeks ago, the U.S. Navy had a military ceremony to recognize him in La Paz at his gravesite. There's this thing called the Veterans Affiliated Council of Sacramento County. It's been around since 1920. I'm the second Chicano in all those years to be commander, and I proposed to the committee to represent Sacramento County VAC to go down and represent, to lay a wreath in honor of Cesar. There's two people who objected to it, because they're in their eighties and their needle's still stuck.

Anyway, I got approval. I had to have approval to go down properly. We were the only county in California to be down there as a military unit, a veteran service organization, to lay a wreath in honor, and it was very elaborate. The Navy was all dressed out and they gave roses to each member of the family, and I had a chance to meet Helen. Now, I never met Cesar, but I met Helen, his widow, and I gave her the card of condolences and I sat down with her and I showed her this hat. This is something that I started two years ago. And she cried.

Because we started the chapter two years ago, and the first name I gave to our state commander, he didn't want that used because it was for somebody else. So the second name we came up was—did you know Cesar was a war veteran? Most people don't. Did you know that the U.S. Navy named a ship after him? The news media

keeps that stuff quiet. There's a huge ammunition cargo ship right now in the Indian Ocean that was dedicated about two years ago in his name. That's a big honor.

So I showed the cap to Helen, and we gave a cap to his son Paul. This is the second year this chapter is active. Today's ceremony, we recognized Rocky Chávez. He's a Marine colonel and he's a current Republican assemblyman from L.A. And we recognized other people who were active in politics, and that's why I ran little bit late.

But we're recognizing students and scholarships. That's what we're working for in his name, and it's a continuation of people's dreams, you know. I don't want the younger generation to go through what we went through. I said that before, but you've got to pay attention or it'll come back. You've got to pay attention.

Mendoza What significance did the organizations or activities that were created play in the Movement?

[00:47:01]

Rios The difference was it took time, but there was changes made through the election process, the democratic process. It took time. Not to sound—maybe I shouldn't say it. [laughs] We didn't burn down cities. We didn't rob and loot stores to get our changes. We had changes done through peaceful, peaceful methods. Cesar Chavez, he did it his way. It took time, but it got done peacefully. Like my father, he's successful in having the first Mexican American congressman done through the election process. Education, patience. The one thing we need more is unity, *la raza*, unity. I'm amazed at how many intelligent Chicanos I know that aren't being recognized by the *gabacho* media or even each other.

I'm not sure if I answer your question. Did I?

Mendoza Yes.

Alfaro So, looking back, do you think there's any issues that were left unsolved?

[00:48:34]

Rios Any issues that were left unsolved? Any issues? I'd like to say voting, getting a solid base on voting. I believe in the election process. About twenty years ago, I started working with the voter registration of Sacramento County as a polling precinct officer. Do you know what a polling precinct officer does? No? We set up the polling place, we set up the tables, then I have four clerks come in and we set up the notices, 100 people in a polling place. Then we set up the ballots and we set up security, and we post all the signs in the room. Before that, I go and I find a location for the polling place, handicap parking, all the stuff that takes place. It don't just happen.

Then on the day of the election, we're set up at 6:00 o'clock in the morning and then we open the doors, and then we close the doors at 8:00. What I have noticed, having done this, is that out of qualified voters in any precinct, 33 percent to 30 percent show up to vote. So people who are being elected are being done on lifting the majority. And out of that, you have 6 percent minority, and out of that, you have even less Mexicanos coming out to vote. I cannot emphasize enough that the Mexicanos have the power, power. If they came together unified, quit bickering, come together, become unified, they have a powerful voice not just in California, but in America, and especially in Sacramento County, because you have people on the Sacramento County board who need to be educated, because I've seen their populace.

Each supervisor, I've checked that populace and they are ignoring the minority segment of their constituents. And out of that, there's a big majority of Mexicanos that aren't speaking up that could vote them out, but they don't show up on election day.

That's one thing that has not been—I've seen people who have worked hard to get the vote out, to get the people interested, to step up to vote, but they don't step up to vote when it counts on election day, and it's really important, because, you know, it's one thing to talk about voting, it's one thing to talk about having the right to vote. But I served my country during the Vietnam era, but I also fought in [Operation] Desert Storm twice, and then I went to Korea three times in the Army. To be overseas and to see people who have no right to vote and have no entitlements, and then to come back and see people who have the right to vote and don't take the opportunity to get off on one day to vote, it just kind of aggravates me, especially when we have the power by the numbers. By the numbers, we have the power in California.

My dad said, "If you don't vote, don't complain." And then I hear people two days later after the election, they're complaining.

And I said, "Well, did you vote?"

"No."

I said, "Well, shut up. Just be quiet. You didn't vote, I don't want to hear it." Maybe that's too blunt. [laughs]

But that's the one item I'd like to see, is somebody or a committee or something, organize Mexicanos in California to go out and vote, especially with this

upcoming presidential election. It's power. We could have a voice that'll rock their boat. It'll scare them, and they'll start paying attention. Education, immigration, healthcare, infrastructure, streets, the neighborhoods, policing, all the stuff that impacts them, but for whatever reason, the majority the Mexicanos do not get out on Tuesday in November and vote. It's an opportunity missed.

I think I answered your question on that one.

Mendoza Can you describe the effects of the Chicano Movement on life in Sacramento and how it impacted specifically where you lived?

[00:54:03]

Rios Well, in the state of California, at that level—and correct me. He can verify if I'm right or wrong. In 1964, besides the civil rights bill signed by [Lyndon B.] Johnson, in '64, California—I forget exactly who signed it. It's called the California Fair Housing Act. When that bill was signed, that meant anybody, Asian, Black, Mexicano, were no longer stuck in Southside Park. They could go anywhere they want. They could search for a house and the banks had to consider their application. Now they could move and go out.

This even impacts travel. If you're a Mexicano or Black, you would have to think twice about traveling. If you go to Seattle, hotels may not want you there. That happened to me one time to Seattle. If you're Mexicano in California and you go to Texas, you might get a rude awakening. Traveling free in California and you go to Texas, it'd be a change, surprise, surprise. The biggest thing I saw in my life was the Fair Housing Act. Opportunity became available. You could move wherever you

want. Today I live in Greenhaven, Greenhaven-Pocket Road. Do you know where that's at?

Mendoza I know.

[00:55:53]

Rios That was predominantly, predominately a White area. My dad would take us in a car—he had a '46 Dodge—and for our Sunday vacation, he would take us on a tour and he would take us to Southland Drive down the road. They didn't take us to Greenhaven. We were seeing places we'd *never* be able to live. Because of this law, I live there now. Because of this law, you have Black families living there. I think things change peacefully through the election process to legislation, and this law makes it available for me to live where I want, and today I live in Greenhaven. I think about that when I water my lawn late at night. I think of how it was then and how it is now. I was watering my lawn yesterday. I take care of my lawn.

Another law, I forget when it was passed, it was against the law for a Black, Asian or Mexican to marry a White girl, or a female to marry a White guy. It was against the law. You could not do it. You'd be arrested. So if that law was still current, I would have been arrested when I was married to my high school sweetheart. That law was miscegenation. I think it's called miscegenation. And that became banished in, I think, '68.

There's current laws that have impacted the farmworkers immediately, education, fair employment, salaries, healthcare, and it's come directly from Cesar Chavez. Their lifestyle has basically improved. And law enforcement, there's certain laws that came down. They could can stop us whenever they wanted to, for any

reason. Now they can't, and those laws were brought by a Latino Caucus back in the eighties or nineties. At one time, there was no Latino Caucus at the Capitol. A Latino Caucus didn't exist because you didn't have enough Latino legislators or senators to put together a caucus. So I've seen those kind of changes as I live, and it's for the better, for our life.

Alfaro So do you see yourself as being involved in meeting these challenges and continue doing what you're doing with programs?

[00:59:14]

Rios I can do as much as I want, as long as I clear it through my wife first. [laughter] She's my community. I have to have her support to do what I do, because if I don't, there's going to be trouble. [laughs] But that comes with any husband.

American GI Forum, she knows that I'm active in that. I support that. I work extensively with Hiram Johnson ROTC cadets. Do you know where Hiram Johnson's at? That's the high school I went to. I graduated '65, 1965. [laughs] They have ROTC. Those cadets, they come from low-income—the majority come from low-income, single family.

At one time, my wife and I took them home because the city district cut off the transportation. So when they provide a color guard or ceremony for events, they can't get home on a school bus like they used to, so my wife and I provided transportation, and I took them to their home. It was an eye-opener, because they live in poverty. I didn't realize it until I actually saw it. But these kids excel, their character. They have hopes, and I'm dedicated to see cadets, because in a uniform they shine—you could not imagine—and their manners. They have hopes and

dreams. And their grade-point average, they try, they do. Not everyone wants to be a cadet. They have different reasons. But the majority, they see education as the escape out of where they're living now. And my wife supports me in that endeavor. She's met these kids.

I've worked with them for eight years, and I work with Lieutenant Colonel Rick Husken [phonetic] and Master Sergeant Jim Ross [phonetic]. These guys have done a lot to have these kids, instead of going left to be in a gangbanger, they go right to being a citizen, gainfully employed, education, college, to be sitting where you're sitting, to even consider going to college. A couple have considered going to the Air Force Academy. There's one or two are pilots. They come back to the school to speak. They're pilots in the Air Force.

So just to see these kids be able to have the opportunity to live their dreams or the fact that they even have a dream. Because when I get on light rail, I see kids their age and I want to smack them, I want to choke them, I want to kick them in the butt, because they're just punks, they're thugs. But they don't have either the family structure, the training. They don't have respect for themselves, so why should they have respect for anybody on the light rail?

One time I was getting off the light rail—and I got injured in the Persian Gulf on this side [demonstrates]. I can't play guitar no more. Remember I used to play guitar? I can't play guitar no more. My knee's messed up, my ankle's messed up. And I'm coming from the VA Hospital. I've got brand-new braces. I'm coming down the light rail. I'm stepping down light rail, K Street by the Cathedral. I'm not moving fast enough, and these two Mexican *vato* punks pushed me. I landed on this leg. And if I

could have, I would have turned around. I would have been twenty years old. [laughs] But I couldn't. So I compare these two guys on the light rail as to these two students that are just what I hope the younger generation can be. But it takes effort, you know. This lieutenant colonel and this master sergeant are putting the time and effort to have these kids change their attitude, *attitude*.

I don't know if I'm running short, but I wanted to show you something real quick. I said I was a second commander. Since 1950, we've put flags on the grave at the Sacramento City Cemetery, and this event is Saturday. As a commander, I'm inviting everybody out this Saturday, 11:00 o'clock, to attend the ceremony.

One thing at the Desert Storm. This'll kill you [demonstrates]. It killed me. People say they're in combat. They exaggerate. This is the battlefield, Albergan [phonetic]. This is six miles outside of the Kuwait National Airport.

This is the—surprise, surprise—my mom sent me this. This is the flag we fought for and this is the flag we recognize. I was the only guy over there that carried the Mexican flag on my Humvee. [laughs] A lot of the White guys were just saying, “Oh, can I buy that Iraq flag?”

I says, “No, it's not an Iraq flag. It's a Mexican flag, knucklehead.” [laughter]

But that's what I emphasize. As a soldier, we fought for the American flag, but I always remember my heritage, Mexicano. I still want to stay active for the youth. Education is the way out, and the election process is a way to change. I learned that from my father.

Like I say, I saw David Rasul last night, I saw Juanish today, and these guys are two high examples of history back in the days when I was skinny, with long hair.

It was exciting. It was like revolutionary times. I didn't realize how exciting it was. I walked this campus. I was taking art as a major, history minor. There was good professors, and we'd go out there and we'd discuss politics and how to change the world and Vietnam, right out there outside the cafeteria. It was thrilling at the time, and it's thrilling now, because one of the biggest things I enjoy is seeing these cadets graduate from high school and go either into college or going to a career, instead of left, with a bandana and a gangbanger.

I don't know if I'm saying what I'm supposed to say? Any more questions?

Mendoza That concludes our interview.

[01:07:30]

Rios Okay.

Alfaro Thank you.

[End of interview]