

The Sacramento Movimiento Chicano and Mexican American Education
Oral History Project

Jorge Armando Santana

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Senon Valadez
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Transcription by Yajaira Ramírez Sigala and Technitype Transcripts

Valadez So, for the record, please state your full name.

[00:00:09]

Santana Jorge Armando Santana Rosas.

Valadez And your birthdate?

[00:00:15]

Santana I was born November 21st, 1944.

Valadez Your marital status?

[00:00:23]

Santana I'm married to Alma Alicia Lepe.

Valadez You have children?

[00:00:29]

Santana I have two daughters, Cynthia and Elizabeth.

Valadez Their ages, something about them?

[00:00:40]

Santana The oldest daughter's forty-four, and she teaches Spanish at Stanford University—

Valadez Oh, my.

[00:00:49]

Santana —and my other daughter has her child psychology practice in Palo Alto.

Valadez Fantastic.

[00:00:57]

Santana And she's thirty-nine. This year she'll be forty.

Valadez Where were you born?

[00:01:09]

Santana I was born in Rosarito, Baja California *norte*, about 30 miles south of Tijuana. I was raised primarily in South San Diego, which used to be called Palm City, near Imperial Beach, so it was about five miles from the Mexican border. My father had a hotel in Tijuana on Revolución Avenue, so after school, we would go and help our father with the hotel as bellboys and whatever he wanted us to do. So we kind of had a foot in Tijuana and a foot in the United States.

Valadez Wow. What did your mom do?

[00:01:57]

Santana My mom was a stay-home mom. There were nine of us kids, so she had her hands full. There were four boys and five girls. I'm the third of the oldest.

Valadez So, five boys and—

[00:02:13]

Santana The opposite. Five girls and four boys.

Valadez And they all are still doing okay?

[00:02:20]

Santana Yeah. The only one that's no longer with us is Sergio. He had gone to Vietnam, and when he came back from Vietnam, he just was not mentally capable, so he was on 100 percent disability, and one day he just passed away. He was younger than I was.

Valadez Was that in 1960?

[00:02:41]

Santana Yeah, that was in the sixties when he went off to Vietnam, probably around '65 or so, the height of the Vietnam War. I have a sister that's written a number of works, and one of them kind of is centered on our brother Sergio. My sister's Patricia Santana, and the title of that book is *Motorcycle Ride on the Sea of Tranquility*. It has to do primarily with my brother Sergio.

Valadez Upon his return?

[00:03:19]

Santana Yeah.

Valadez Good. I'll have to look that one up. Tell me about your childhood, your youth.

[00:03:26]

Santana Well, we came to the United States when I was four years old. My father at that time was working kind of as a farmhand, working in nearby places like Ramona and San Diego. We moved around from Lemon Grove to different places and ended up in Palm City, which is, like I said, about five miles north of the Tijuana-Mexico border. So he used to trade with a lot of goats and animals, so we always had—in our home we had chickens and goats, and even a horse now and then.

But he eventually got into buying the hotel in Tijuana, and we stayed put after that. He was in charge of that hotel for maybe about fifteen, eighteen years, and then he went into having a couple of restaurants, one in Rosarito and one in Tijuana that had to do with *carnitas*.

I went to elementary school not knowing English, so it was kind of traumatic for me because we only spoke Spanish at home. My parents seldom spoke English, and since I was third oldest of the kids, going to school not knowing English was difficult at first, but with time and just struggling, I was able to get it.

I was kind of a very rascally kid, always mischievous, but I think when my dad had us working in the field during the summers, after school, we would use the *azadón corto*, the *corto*, you know. At that time, it was permitted, but now it's illegal. But I think that experience, working in the fields under the hot sun and with tomatoes and other types of vegetables made me realize that my future was not in agriculture. So, I became, I think, a more serious student and applied myself to try to not be in the hot fields.

Valadez That's pretty hot in Tijuana.

[00:05:59]

Santana Yes.

Valadez We're going to shift over now. Were you a Fellow or Felito? Were you in the Mexican American [Education] Project?

[00:06:09]

Santana I came when it was well established, but I came as a professor for the foreign language department, in Spanish.

Valadez About what year was that?

Santana That was 1972, so basically I spent thirty-seven years in the Department of Foreign Languages, primarily, of course, teaching Spanish language and culture. So I taught a lot of courses, and I did have quite a number of students from different programs at the university, like CAMP and also I think Alvino had the Chicanito Science Project. So I had some contact with him in that program.

Valadez Alvino Chavez?

[00:06:58]

Santana Yes, Avino Chavez, exactly.

Valadez Since you were not in the Mexican American Project, when you started to teach, you had a background in culture, or did you ever take a course or courses in culture or cultural anthropology or anything like that?

[00:07:19]

Santana When I went to San Diego State, that's where I got my BA and MA. I did take a number of classes having to do with basically anthropology, general

anthropology, but also other fields related to anthropology and, of course, taking a lot of classes in Spanish literature as well as civilization and culture. I think that's where my interest in promoting and specializing in culture was one of my better specialties, ethnography.

I always used to take a lot of groups traveling to not only Mexico, Central America, South America, but also Spain. So I had to always serve kind of as a leader and a guide for my students, and we always had a lot of Latinos going on these programs because we had a very good three-summer master's program. So a student from maybe Chicago or from Boston or from Sacramento would sign up for the master's program and they would have to go to three different countries or three different summers, and I generally taught the culture classes.

Valadez What countries did you go to other than Mexico and Central and South America?

[00:08:50]

Santana In Central America, it was primarily Guatemala and Costa Rica. In South America, it was Peru. And then we had a very strong program in Burgos, Spain. So those were the main. I tried to take a group to Cuba. I did take some groups to Cuba, but they were more culture oriented; they weren't part of the master's program.

Valadez Did these courses or these exposures to culture make it easier to understand the Chicano Movement?

[00:09:25]

Santana I think it gave a wider perspective. I think it's like seeing the tree in the forest. I think the Chicano Movement was very instrumental as a foundation, but it also, I think, gave a lot of the students, especially a lot of the Mexican American students that went on my program, it gave them a wider perspective that the Chicano Movement or that Chicanos are not insular. They also have a broad tradition, not only European, but also indigenous, because we did spend time in Yucatán, and, of course, Central Mexico, so they had the Aztec. And then in Michoacán, there's other indigenous groups and then they contrasted it with their experience with Peru, so that gave them a wider perspective, I felt.

Valdez Yeah, especially for all of those who were involved in languages.

[00:10:32]

Santana Yes, because many of them eventually became high school Spanish teachers, most of them, and, of course, they're able to promote the Latino/Hispanic culture, indigenous as well.

Valdez How about the word *Chicano*? How did that—

[00:10:54]

Santana I think when I was a teenager, that was somewhat a controversial term, because some people that had maybe just recently arrived from Mexico felt, well, that word was derogatory. And I know some parents didn't want their children to use that. They would say, "*No. Tú eres mexicano.*" "You're Mexican." So there was that somewhat bias or stigma. I don't know what the main cause was, if maybe—because I remember going down to Mexico and my cousins would say *pocho*. They would call

me *pocho*, or my brothers and sisters, because when we were ten, twelve years old, we would maybe massacre Spanish or put in Spanglish or something like that, so the word *pocho* was not necessarily a word to compliment, you know. So there was that. But I think through time and especially with the Chicano Movement, Cesar Chavez, and the progress that was made, I think the word came into being very important.

One of the things I did when I first arrived at the university was to create two classes in Spanish. One was the Chicano Culture class and the other one was the Chicano Literature class. I taught the Spanish writers. Olivia Castellano, in the English department, she taught Chicano Literature but in English. So we had two departments, the English and the Spanish, both teaching Chicano Literature, and it's something that I think served a good purpose. Initially I had a lot of students, then with time, I think the enrollments dropped because they were maybe changing the general education requirements.

Valadez I wonder if social class had anything to do with the acceptance or nonacceptance of the word *Chicano*. What do you think?

[00:13:08]

Santana Well, I think probably with the more educated Mexicans, it might have been, but even—I know my father always had workers, and sometimes they felt they're Mexican. I think that as a rule, a *mexicano* considers himself *muy mexicano*, and I think being associated or being part of a group which was the Chicano, they probably felt, "Well, I'm Mexican. Why do I need to be Chicano?" But I think that their children accepted the word *Chicano* much more, much more.

Valadez Do you think the Movimiento Chicano influenced or affected you or changed you personally?

[00:14:03]

Santana Oh, yes. No, no, I was up on what was happening in the Civil Rights Movement and, of course, Cesar Chavez stands out as the top promoter of not only the rights for farmworkers, which is, I think, very basic, and I think many of our family members were involved in the agricultural profession, so anything that helped them make their job lighter, make their job better paid, I think we all embraced that, and to me that was very important.

Valadez How about the role of Chicanas? There's been a curiosity, today especially, but even then, as to the role that Mexican women, or Chicanas or Latinas, played in the Movement. What's your perception of that?

[00:15:05]

Santana Well, I think they basically had a role similar to the *soldaderas* from the Mexican Revolution. Many of them, with the exception of Dolores Huerta, of course, she was right alongside Cesar Chavez, but a lot of the women Chicanas were kind of in the back, according to my opinion.

But a lot of them, I think, were faced with different obstacles. One of them that I found as a professor with my Latina students is that many times the father would not want them to be in college, so it was a struggle for them just to get out of the house and go to college, and so that maybe kept the Chicana from getting educated sooner than they should have been. I think they would have progressed had

the father been open to their daughters. I think the mother always encouraged the Latina Chicano daughter to go to college, because she didn't want her daughter to be in her situation.

Valadez What do you think were some of the changes or courses or activities that you participated in or initiated during this time period?

[00:16:46]

Santana On the campus or university?

Valadez On the campus, off campus.

[00:16:51]

Santana Well, as a college professor, we had to participate in a lot of committees and so forth, and I know when David Ballesteros was dean, he would always be having a lot of meetings at his house, and I think that brought us together more as a cohesive group. We were all, I think, encouraged to try to promote not only the Chicano philosophy, but the Latino need for bilingual people to be active in the community, to serve the community.

So I also worked or volunteered in a number of organizations. That was, I think, a way for me to get to know the community. I used to do some book reviews on a Spanish-English television program that they had during the weekends in the mornings, so that gave me exposure and it was my way of trying to have people maybe read some of these books that I would do a review of.

Valadez Did courses that you created, were they motivated or driven by the need on campus?

[00:18:20]

Santana Yeah, and most of my colleagues in the language department encouraged me to try to meet the needs of a lot of Latinos that were coming on campus. A lot of them were Chicano and Mexican American, but I also had students that were from Venezuela, because at one time there was this one heavily-endowed program from the Venezuelan government to bring over Venezuelans to learn English primarily, and, of course, they wanted to stay in touch with their roots and not only just English, so I think that had far-reaching effects also outside the Chicano parameter.

Valadez What courses did you teach while you were there?

[00:19:12]

Santana Besides the Chicano Culture and then the Chicano Literature, I also taught Hispanic Folklore, Mexican Civilization and Culture, also Spanish Civilization and Culture and Latin American Civilization and Culture. On occasion, I would teach maybe a graduate seminar having to do with Latino cinema or Mexican cinema and even Cuban cinema. When I started taking groups traveling to Cuba, I became interested in Cuban cinematography.

Valadez Do you think that the Movement changed or had an effect on your consciousness of events and things that were going on?

[00:20:03]

Santana Yeah. I think when I was down at San Diego State, I was more concentrated on my studies to try to achieve my degrees, plus I was working like

thirty hours a week and taking a full load, so it made it hard for me to be involved actively, but I think that was very instrumental especially with the movements going on, civil rights.

And then coming here to Sacramento State, I think this campus had a much more active group. When I was at San Diego State, they were just kind of starting. The Movement was starting. We're talking about 1964, '63, '64. The Movement was not fully developed.

Learning was always difficult for me, so I had to apply myself. When I finished my master's, I was granted a couple of grants to go study in Spain, and that opened up a whole new world for me. I did my dissertation on the Mexican Revolution, so I always kept my emphasis on my background.

So, yeah, in that sense, I think I became more aware of the Chicano Movement here in Sacramento with people like Senon Valadez and, of course, Steve Arvizu and, of course, Isabel and, of course, Joe Serna and the artist José Montoya and others. They were a very active group, very active.

Valadez Did your level of activity or involvement affect your home life, your families, or the people that you were living with at the time?

[00:22:40]

Santana Well, with my daughters, I know that we would go to a lot of events. Like Día de Los Muertos, I know that that was a big activity and still is, where they would have the pilgrimage from Saint Mary's Church to the cemetery. Of course, I had a number of students that were very active and they would invite me to some of

their events. Graciela Ramírez, for example, she was very, very involved and she was working on a book on kind of the history of the Chicanos in Sacramento area, and that was exciting. I think that was a project and I always encouraged her to have it published, to publish it because that was needed. So I supported her fully on that and a lot of other organizations.

Valadez And she did it!

[00:23:37]

Santana Yeah, just about a year or year and a half ago.

Valadez Twelve, you've already answered. That has to do with how did the Movimiento Chicano influence your career.

[00:23:55]

Santana Well, of course, I think the main influence was my coming up with these two courses, the Chicano Literature and the Chicano Culture. I had some guest speakers that were very good. I know we had Rudolfo Anaya come one time from New Mexico and speak to the group. So I think that was something that was needed for the Chicanos, Latinos at Sac State to get to know some of these writers and artists.

Valadez What was their response to this?

[00:24:36]

Santana Good. The meeting room was jampacked with people, I think not only through me, but also through Olivia Castellano, because she was, of course, teaching *Bless Me, Ultima*, which is his probably foremost novel.

Valadez So, through your courses, you created a better understanding or a wider perspective on the Movement.

[00:25:04]

Santana Yeah, and when I planned the curriculum for these two classes, of course, I tried to select what I considered some of the best things. I did have maybe some negative articles, just so the students could see how the Movement at one time maybe was vilified or was not taken in the right—I know that the Bilingual Movement was very controversial. I'm having a senior moment, but the name of that guy that wrote on bilingual education, a Chicano. He's Chicano now; he wasn't.

Valadez *In the Absence of—*

[00:25:50]

Santana *Of My Father*, something.

Valadez Yeah.

[00:25:53]

Santana But he did an earlier book. He was raised here in Sacramento. But he kind of knocked down bilingual education, and I used that book to illustrate he's wrong. And I think time has proven, because I think now he's had to learn Spanish. I forget his name. I'll come up with it.

Valadez I know who you're talking about. I've forgotten his name too.

Santana *Recuerdos de Mi Padre* or something like that, the second book.

Valadez The challenges to the Movement or to the directions of the Movement were not always bad challenges; they were required challenges in order to create a

better understanding of what was going on. How do you believe the Movement affected life here in Sacramento?

[00:26:50]

Santana Well, if anything, it was a positive effect. I think that, for example, the Royal Chicano Air Force, the RCAF, was promoting art, and we would see murals not only at Sac State, but near Macy's and other places, so I think that opened up a new era aesthetically for Sacramento. And then I think promoting events like the Día de los Muertos, the Chicanito Science Project, I think that influenced a lot of young children. And also the Washington Neighborhood Center, I think they always had all kinds of events that promoted getting the parents involved with their children. A lot of the parents, of course, were either working in the canneries or working in the fields, so it permitted them to be doing activities with their children, and guided by people like Graciela Ramírez and others.

So I think the Movement itself was very good and, of course, later, José Montoya's son Richard with Culture Clash, even though he was performing all over the state and outside the state, but when he would come to Sacramento, especially Sacramento State University, there was always a good, good response. So, culturally I think that was good.

I think the Mexican Consulate finally turned around. I think initially the Mexican government kind of had a hands-off, and through time, I think they realized they can be not our adversaries, but they can be our allies. I noticed that throughout

the years how the Mexican government evolved and became much more open to the Chicanos and the Chicano Movement.

And I know that there were a number of magazines in Mexico City from the Colegio de México or the UNAM that would publish articles on the Chicano Movement, so they were somewhat spreading the word and trying to make known to Mexico that the Chicano Movement was alive and was producing positive results, because a lot of, of course, the agricultural workers here were the uncles or the grandparents or the sons of people living in Mexico.

Valadez How about *teatro*?

[00:29:47]

Santana *Teatro de Luis Valdez*?

Valadez Mm-hmm.

[00:29:52]

Santana I really enjoyed that. I went to as many performances as I could, and in fact, in my Chicano Culture class I would use some of his short theatrical plays that were on film.

Valadez And Manuel Pickett, the Teatro Chicano that he—

[00:30:16]

Santana Yeah, exactly. Prior to him, there was another professor involved with theatre, and I'm having—

Valadez We've tried to think that name, but I haven't been able to.

[00:30:30]

Santana I'll think of it. I'll think of it, yeah.

Valadez I think there was an Isabel and then there was a Zamora.

[00:30:38]

Santana Yeah, Zamora.

Valadez I don't have the full names.

[00:30:42]

Santana When I come up with it, I'll send you an email with his name.

Valadez That would be good. We're needing that information.

[00:30:50]

Santana If anything, I think the Teatro Chicano with Manuel Pickett, I think it confirmed that the university, at least not only the theatre department, but other departments were recognizing the value of promoting and allowing students to know their roots better.

Valadez See, in the Black community you have the Black theatre evolving through the history of this country, but Latinos in *teatro*, seemed like that's kind of something that began to emerge especially during this Movement, where more and more people, out of the *actos* of Luis Valdez, you have now the Chicano Teatro promoting—

[00:31:44]

Santana Yeah. Another class that I did teach a few times was Teatro Latinoamericano, but it was basically reading, more like a literature class. We weren't actually acting out. But prior to my arriving at the university, I think Estella Serrano

had some of her students do some performances. I don't know if that was in association with Mexican American Project or was just one of her own class projects, but—

Valadez We did one called *El Color de Nuestra Piel* back in '68. She was directing it, she and another young man—I don't remember his name—and Olivia. They had all come together and collaborated on getting that. Then they had another production either before or after, but that's kind of the way it started. And it was in English, but it was with Mexican themes, so with universal themes. *El Color de Nuestra Piel*.

[00:32:51]

Santana *El Color de Nuestra Piel* was one of the works that I centered on in my class because I think it had a strong message that people could relate to it from different levels.

Valadez A lot of people have passed away. Like I was sharing with you, when we did our first reunion in 2013, we found that ninety-nine of the people that we could identify were gone. Were there any people that are gone now, that left a good impression or left an impression on you about the changing times?

[00:33:32]

Santana Well, I think—I don't know if you remember Jacinto Jenkins [phonetic].

Valadez Yes.

[00:33:39]

Santana Jacinto Jenkins, he was originally from Texas, but he had his doctorate from Stanford. When I got here in Sacramento, he was completely supportive of me creating these classes, and I think that made it a lot easier, so I think he was very instrumental in that, besides Estella Serrano being involved. I think Isabel Hernandez Serna was a student there and also teaching part-time in the Spanish area, and later she went into administration. So there was a good group of people there that I think helped the Movement. Jacinto Jenkins, he taught a lot of the classes that later I took over when he passed away. So, basically, I inherited his teaching load, so to speak. I think he was very important. I don't know if Bob Arrellanes [phonetic] was involved. I know he was in a totally different field which was more, I think, economics or—

Valadez He became—

[00:34:56]

Santana Dean.

Valadez —one of the Ethnic Studies directors down the way, but I don't know what he was doing earlier on.

Santana Yes, when I got there, I think he was more teaching economics, if I'm right.

And who else? Joe Serna, of course, was very involved in the politics or history and political science department more so at that time. David Ballesteros, he came the same year I did, and he was dean, I think for six or seven years or ten years, maybe so, and then left, but I think he was very supportive of that, at least in my recollection.

Valadez Anyone else you can think of that left an impression on you because of the things they were doing?

[00:35:55]

Santana I think people like Sam Rios, Steve Arvizu. Steve Arvizu, I know he had some encounters with the Foundation, and I think they were probably just harassing him. I knew the director of the Foundation of time, Gene Morris [phonetic], and I think he gave Steve a lot of grief, and I think that was uncalled for. In other areas, I don't recall at this point.

Valadez What do you see as future challenges for the Chicano community?

[00:36:50]

Santana Well, I think the emphasis on education has become less. I don't know if maybe the parents are into their own life and they're not promoting having their children educated, but I would like to see more of that. It seemed like when I came to Sacramento in 1972 to maybe 1990, there was a heavy emphasis on get educated, get your degree, it's very important, not only your BA, but go on further. And it seems like that's not as much.

Plus, I noticed in my last years before I retired, when I would come across scholarships, I would try to encourage my students to apply for these scholarships. You know, \$1,000 here, \$1,500, that always come in handy. And I would tell them, "I'm going to put this scholarship announcement here on the table, so after class come on by and take down the information." Very few people would do that, and I don't know if maybe because the kids were enabled and they had their mom and dad

pay for their college and it was easier to say, “Dad, I need \$1,000 for a computer,” or something that, and they weren’t striving to make their way on their own. And that’s where I think we need to maybe emphasize more.

Valadez Do you see yourself staying involved still, now that you’ve retired, or are you choosing something more quiet?

[00:38:44]

Santana Well, since I retired, I’ve gone into doing a lot of cultural videos on YouTube and also photography, and I’ve had a number of photo exhibits, one on “Cuba Today,” another one on “Disappearing Trades in Mexico.” And, of course, a lot of those trades in Mexico that are disappearing are causing Mexicans and Central Americans to come to the United States, so it does have some ramifications.

But I’m enjoying what I call my creative stage, and I’ve been working closely with the Mexican Consulate office, and recently I was asked to participate with a committee to evaluate student essays to get scholarships, because the Mexican government is offering scholarships to high school students and also college-bound students.

Valadez From Mexico?

[00:39:53]

Santana No, that live here, that live here. Although they do have exchange programs where they send Chicano or Mexican American students to go spend time in Mexico and vice versa. So that’s a great program, plus they even have it for graduate students. So, for example, people that are students, that are graduate

students, are wanting to be doctors or studying medicine come here to Davis and they work with a professor during the summer. So these kinds of exchanges I've been involved with as well.

Valadez That's great. Jorge, is there anything else that you remember of that time period that you would like to share, to leave as your memory, your perspective from the time period you taught? That was the time period of when a lot of the Movement was going on. Everything was changing, seems like, in society. Vietnam, everything was going on. So what's your impression of it all?

[00:41:03]

Santana Well, I think I was very fortunate in coming to Sacramento, since not only it was, you might say, the political capital of the state, but I felt that culturally and then the Chicano Movement, it was a very active group, and I was fortunate to come here with people that I think reached out to me and made me feel part of the community. In that sense, I feel very lucky. And it also allowed me to bring in or help bring in other Chicano professors like Fausto Avendaño.

Valadez He came after you?

[00:41:45]

Santana Yes, he came after me and I helped hire him. He had to come in and teach not only Spanish, but also Portuguese, and he also ended up teaching French. So he was a polyglot in that sense. So in that sense, I think my stay at the university was very fortunate. I consider myself very lucky to have come here. I could've gone

to maybe Boulder, Colorado, or maybe Chico State, the party school. [laughter]

Sorry, sorry, Chico, you know. [laughter]

But I think I was fortunate to be involved in the community here, and I want to thank the Mexican American Project for having blazed the trail, because basically I'm sure it was not easy to open doors for a lot of Chicanos. When I came, the doors were wide open, and so I think it made it easier for people like me and Fausto and others that came later.

[00:43:06]

Valadez I want to thank you for participating in this oral interview. Hopefully it has permitted you to share some things that are part of your mindset, part of what happened to you during this time period.

Santana I'd be interested in hearing what others have said too. Hopefully, once it's in a finalized form, I think the public can have access to it, right?

Valadez Yes.

Santana That's the goal, right?

Valadez That's the goal.

Santana Good, good. Well, thank you, Senon. I appreciate it.

[End of interview]