

Edward Escobar

*Edward Escobar: Reflections on a Career in Chicana/o Studies*

Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by  
Todd Holmes  
in 2018

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generous support of Arizona State University.

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Edward Escobar (Courtesy of Edward Escobar)

## Abstract

Edward Escobar is professor emeritus in the School of Transborder Studies at Arizona State University. Born and raised in East Los Angeles, Professor Escobar received his PhD in history from UC Riverside. He held administrative positions at UC Irvine and Stanford University before joining the faculty at Indiana University Northwest, where he taught some of the first courses in Latino studies. He came to Arizona State in 1993 tasked with developing the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies, of which he served as founding chair. In the years that followed, he would become one of the leading architects of ASU's renowned School of Transborder Studies. In addition to his administrative achievements, he is the author of many publications within the field of Chicana/o Studies, such as: *History, Culture, and Society: Chicano Studies in the 1980s* (1983); *Forging A Community: The Latino Experience in Northwest Indiana, 1919-1975* (1987); "The Dialectics of Repression: The Los Angeles Police Department and the Chicano Movement," (1993); *Race, Police, and the Making of Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900-1945* (1999); and "The Unintended Consequences of the Carceral State: Chicana/o Political Mobilization in Post-World War II America" (2015). In this interview, Professor Escobar discusses: his family background and upbringing; his educational journey from high school to attending California State University Dominguez Hills; his affiliation with the Chicano movement and efforts to bring the Mexican American experience into education; his graduate experience at UC Riverside; his reflections on the state of Chicana/o studies during the early years and how the field evolved over the decades; the aims and contributions of his scholarship in the field; the reception of Chicana/o studies at the universities he served; the Chicana/o Studies and Transborder programs at Arizona State; as well as his thoughts on important works, themes, and high points in the field's development over the last fifty years.

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## Project History

By Todd Holmes  
Berkeley, California

Over fifty years ago, UC Berkeley anthropologist Octavio Romano founded the publication, *El Grito: A Journal of Contemporary Mexican-American Thought*. In many respects, it was one of many actions of the time that sought to channel the educational aims of the Mexican American civil rights movement into the corridors of higher education. And in the years that followed, scholars on campuses throughout California and the West built upon those objectives, ultimately establishing the academic discipline that became known as Chicana/o studies.

The Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project was established in 2017 with the goal of commemorating fifty years of Chicana/o studies and documenting the formation of the field through in-depth interviews with the first generation of scholars who shaped it. As a research unit of The Bancroft Library, the Oral History Center has enjoyed rare access to the academy since its founding in 1953, compiling one of the richest collections on higher education and intellectual history in the country. Interviews with Nobel laureates and university presidents fill this collection, as do those with renowned poets and leading scientists. Thus, oral histories with the founding generation of scholars in the field of Chicana/o studies were a fitting addition. Moreover, documenting the formation of an academic field aimed at studying the Mexican American experience was a rare and special opportunity all its own.

The importance of the project was without question; the reality of executing a project of this size and complexity, however, ushered forth a host of logistical challenges. To that end, we at the Oral History Center forged partnerships with scholars and universities across the country, establishing what could be considered an unprecedented collaboration to document the history of Chicana/o studies and celebrate the scholars who played a vital role in its formation. I first created an advisory council composed of recognized junior faculty in the field. Establishing the council was important, as it not only brought a larger, community voice into decisions on the project's scope and direction, but also seasoned expertise to the nomination process for interviewees—a procedure that likely proved much lengthier and more complicated than anyone anticipated. Ultimately, the council helped develop a list of over twenty-five prominent and pioneering scholars to be interviewed for the project.

The second part of this collaboration developed with universities. The Oral History Center is an independent, soft-money research unit at UC Berkeley, which means the office receives very little direct support from the university. Endowments and fundraising underwrite the OHC's operations. For the Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project, a generous consortium of deans, provosts, chancellors, and presidents stepped forward to extend support. Stanford University sponsored the first two interviews, with the University of California Office of the President raising the bar by pledging to fund all UC-related interviews. The pledge not only sought to highlight the role of UC campuses in the field, but also served as a call to arms for other universities in the West to follow suit. Many university administrators answered that call. Deans at UT Austin, Arizona State, and the University of Arizona pledged support, as did administrators at Loyola Marymount, Gonzaga University, UT San Antonio, Brigham Young University, and the University of Houston, among others. Again, highlighting the leading role of



California in the field, the California State University system agreed to fund all CSU-related interviews for the project. The outpouring of support behind the Chicana/o Studies project stands as an inspiring collaboration within the academy.

The scholars included in this project represent some of the most influential writers, educators, and activists in the field of Chicana/o studies. To be sure, their contributions to the field are many, from teaching and scholarship to mentoring and administration, with each playing a unique and significant role in advancing the study of the Mexican American experience from a mere idea in the late 1960s to a mainstay on college campuses across the country five decades later. I'm indebted to each for their generosity and participation in this project. They not only opened up their homes and offices for the interviews, but shared their work and experiences with sincerity and candor. They also exhibited a noteworthy level of humility, as each would be among the first to call this project far from complete. Projects are often imperfect, and this oral history series is no different. Some of those we wished to include, such as Juan Gómez-Quiñones, passed away before they could be interviewed, just as funding complications have delayed the inclusion of others. Thus, as the first installment of this project goes to press, we remember those who passed before they could participate and look forward to the new additions to be made in the years to come.

This project significantly advances our understanding of the development and evolution of the field of Chicana/o studies. Yet the development of Chicana/o studies, as captured in these interviews, is more than just the story of a discipline. It is the story of a generation of scholars who broke through barriers to take their place in the nation's universities, and spent their careers documenting the history and experience of their community. It is the story of educational reform, where scholars of color demanded that America's curriculum equally include all its citizens. In many respects, it is also a story that highlights another side of the civil rights movement, one where actions in the classroom, rather than those in the streets, proved the long-lasting vector of social change. It is my hope that this project does justice to that legacy.

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## Interview 1: June 29, 2018

Holmes: All right. This is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is June 29, 2018, and I have the pleasure of sitting down with Edward Escobar, for the Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project. We are here at the Bancroft Library in the beautiful city of Berkeley. Ed, thanks so much for sitting down with me.

01-00:00:25

Escobar: It's certainly a pleasure. I'm happy to be here.

Holmes: So in our two sessions, the first one we'll do today, we're going to be discussing your career and experience in the development of the field of Chicano studies. But to start, I wanted to talk a little bit about you and your background. So maybe we should start there, talking about your family and background. Now, you were born in Los Angeles, is that correct?

01-00:00:59

Escobar: Right, in 1946.

Holmes: Okay. Tell me a little bit about your parents and their occupation and background.

01-00:01:05

Escobar: Okay. My parents. My mother was born in Durango, Mexico in 1911. She grew up within the turmoil there, up until 1925, when she and her mother migrated to the United States. She had a fourth-grade education, a formal education, there in Mexico. My father was born in El Paso, Texas, so he was a US citizen from birth. He was born in the Segundo Barrio, which, if you know it, is right on the border, by the Second Street bridge. He was baptized at Sacred Heart Church, which is still standing there. He got a second-grade education. I tell my students is that it's astounding to me that people with a total of sixth grade formal education, four of them in Mexico, for my mother, ended up producing a PhD, someone who stands up and professes truth to scores and hundreds of students over the years.

So that's my parents. They were rather remarkable people in a variety of ways. They were both very active in labor unions in Los Angeles. My father moved to Los Angeles at the age of nineteen, my mother at the age of fourteen. He was born in 1902, so there was nine years of difference between them. They met in, I think, a refrigerator assembly plant in LA. My father eventually became a skilled worker, a highly skilled furniture finisher. He would paint furniture. Tables like this [pointing to table in room] was the work that he did, at a pretty exclusive, high-end furniture factory in Los Angeles. He became the most skilled worker in finishing furniture there, which is very unusual, as he would tell me repeatedly, for a Mexican American to be working in that field. My mother worked in a variety of jobs early on. You undoubtedly know her, as other people do, from Vicki Ruiz's books on cannery workers. She's on

the cover of Vicki's first book [*Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*] and was one of her primary informants for that and some of the other work that she's done on cannery workers. Both [my parents were] very involved in labor union activity.

Their involvement in labor union activity, my father with the United Furniture Workers, my mom with UCAPAWA [United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America], that's what gave them—and I think it's how they passed on to us—a hope that you can make a better life for themselves, because that's what they fought to do. Those stories—the stories of migration from Mexico; the stories of watching what went on in the Mexican Revolution, from my mother's side; what my father could see from the hills of El Paso, growing up and watching the revolution from there, because [Ciudad] Juárez had plenty of battles; and the stories that I heard from him and from my mom. We were always told stories, from my mother's part, about out the conquest of Mexico and stories of the heroism of Cuauhtémoc, and other stories. I think that's what got me interested in thinking about history and getting involved.

01-00:05:36

Just in the romance of it, early on. So really from the get-go—I loved reading history books, even as a child; certainly, as an early adolescent. Those were the kinds of things that I would read, biographies and so on and so forth. That is what gave me an impetus. They always stressed education. They always stressed that they wanted better lives for their kids than they had, because they struggled. My mother went hungry in Mexico. My father suffered from discrimination in Texas, in the early part of the twentieth century. That's why he left Texas at the age of nineteen. I heard all these stories from the beginning, heard stories about their involvement in labor union activities. That's how, sitting one day at a graduate student reception at Stanford, I sat down with this young woman [Ruiz] who said she was doing this dissertation on cannery workers. I said, "You've got to talk to my mom." That's how that relationship got started.

Holmes:

Oh, wow.

01-00:07:00

Escobar:

So it's all of that, that gave me an interest in just reading about the past. But I think early on, obviously, the romanticism of it.

Holmes:

Did you have siblings?

01-00:07:15

Escobar:

I had two siblings, an older brother and a younger sister. We are very far apart. My brother was nine years older than me. He started college, never finished; but had a successful career in business, until he lost it all in—what?—the 2000 recession, the dot-com bust. He had smoked as a young man, stopped smoking, but died of lung cancer in 2004. My sister did finish

college and was an elementary schoolteacher in Wilmington, California. A bilingual teacher, when they had bilingual education in the state. But nevertheless, a teacher in Wilmington, and retired about four or five years ago now.

Holmes: Tell me a little bit about your family environment. You were just saying how your parents stressed education; and that their union activities really helped shape that. Anything you'd like to share about the household and your childhood?

01-00:08:44

Escobar:

Well, a couple of things. First of all, as I said, they stressed education. My father often would not take a vacation, would work through his vacation, in order to be able to send us to Catholic school. The three of us went through twelve years of Catholic school, because they didn't trust public schools giving, I think—but they weren't particularly explicit about this—Mexican American kids a decent education in Los Angeles. They felt that the Catholic schools did a better job. I have to admit, we all got an excellent education in those places. We were treated with dignity. The schools were all integrated. We grew up in South Central—our first home was in Watts, literally, right off of 103<sup>rd</sup> and Wilmington; and then they moved to what is now called South Central, Spring Street and 105<sup>th</sup> Street. That's where I essentially grew up, my father working at a furniture factory, as I said, in Gardena. My mom, after my sister got old enough [and] didn't need care (the cannery closed down in about 1945, 1946, so she didn't work for a number of years, until my sister started school). Then she went back to work, working in retail, at J.J. Newberry's in downtown Los Angeles, and then later, K-Mart. That's where she worked.

Catholicism was very important in our lives. The way we were treated in the Catholic schools—again, with dignity and respect, because they had to cater to Mexican Americans. And the fact that those schools were pretty integrated, [with] large numbers of African Americans, as well as white kids, as well as Mexican Americans, primarily—there weren't other Latino groups there at the time. So I think that, again, gave us a sense of self-worth. Language was an interesting issue. When I looked at this question in your outline that you sent, it reminded me of a story that I like to tell about how my mother, because she was born in Mexico and English was her second language, continually wanted to speak English at home. My father, because he spoke English all day at the factory, wanted to come home and speak Spanish. So my father spoke Spanish—my mother would make fun of the way he spoke Spanish—and my mother spoke English. The kids had to navigate between the two languages, so we grew up pretty bilingual. It was a tight family, despite our years apart, and very supportive of their children, my parents were. We were close; my brother and I and my sister were all very close, and continue to be, with my sister.

Holmes: Well, discuss your experience growing up. As you were saying, you spent time at Watts as well as South Central.

01-00:12:23

Escobar:

Well, they left Watts when I was five, six years old, so that hardly counts. But what happened is, they moved from Watts to 105<sup>th</sup> Street, I think soon after my sister was born. It had more to do with my brother starting high school at Mount Carmel High School. They wanted a direct bus line there that would take him there. So we moved. I've not measured it, but it's about a mile, I think, or so further west. When we moved into that neighborhood, as I recall as a little child, it was entirely white, I think. There might've been a few other Mexicans there. But that's when the block-busting tactics were going on. One African American family moved in, and very quickly, all kinds of for sale signs went up and the neighborhood turned African American very quickly. We went to the local Catholic school, Ascension, which is down on Figueroa, close to Imperial. I did and my sister did. My brother had gone to school back in Watts, at St. Lawrence, which is in the heart of the Watts area.

We had friends, but because we didn't go to the public school, we didn't hang out a lot with [public school] people. We hung out mostly with Catholic school kids, which were not from the immediate neighborhood, but from the broader neighborhood. Again, my friends at Mount Carmel, which is the high school that I went to—and it no longer exists; it closed soon after the Watts uprising of 1965, which is the year that I graduated from there—was, again, very integrated, almost a third, a third, and a third. A third Latino, a third African American, and a third white, because they were bringing kids in from Inglewood and places like that, which at that time, was primarily a white neighborhood. Mount Carmel was an all-boys school. That's just what we did. I had friends from there. I also had jobs. Worked all the way through—as soon as I turned sixteen, well, actually, even before sixteen. My brother was an assistant manager at a local retail store. He got me a job as soon as I could get a work permit, and I worked all the way through high school so I could have a car. I was an LA guy. So that was really important. We were very mobile. The immediate neighborhood didn't have that much of an impact. It was fun. We had the stores; I could walk down the street as a kid, a couple blocks, and go to the local *tortillería* and bring home fresh tortillas to eat. So the peer group, the people that I hung out with, were the kids in elementary school, and then later, high school. And we, as I said, were mobile.

Holmes:

Well, I wanted to ask you a little bit about your high school years. You attended high school primarily 1961 to '65?

01-00:16:32

Escobar:

To '65.

Holmes:

If we look at these years, as both historians, we know that the rising tide of activism was beginning to percolate, particularly in Los Angeles. From civil rights; by the end of your high school year, anti-war movements were beginning to rise; then as you mentioned, the Watts riots. But also in that same year, the grape strike also happened, the farmworkers movement.

01-00:17:00

Escobar: That's right.

Holmes: With this kind of activism going on, what do you recall? Discuss some of your observations and how this impacted you.

01-00:17:10

Escobar: Well, we had a pretty political family. I think it came out of the labor background of my parents. I remember my mother having to end discussions between my father and my brother, talking about Richard Nixon because they agreed on Richard Nixon and what a horrible person they thought he was, but she didn't think it proper to have that kind of a discussion at dinner. So we grew up in a pretty politically-aware family. A newspaper came in. We would get the *Examiner*, not the *Times*, because my father considered—up until then, it was true—the *Times* to be a reactionary paper. Sometimes we would get the *Herald*, too, because it seemed more of a labor paper. The labor union was really important in our family. We grew up aware of broad politics. I remember my mother taking me, early on—I was still in the eighth grade—to Olvera Street, on All Saints' Day. That was a day off from school. I shook hands with John Kennedy, as he was walking through Olvera Street. That was very exciting for me; it was very exciting for my parents to have a Catholic running, and eventually winning, for the presidency. That sort of thing is the context in which I encountered things like the Civil Rights Movement.

Anti-war was—again, my parents were very Catholic. There were problems with the conflict between the Catholicism and labor unions, because both UCAPAWA and the United Furniture Workers were led and highly influenced by communists. So we didn't talk much about Vietnam in those days; but certainly, the Civil Rights struggle, something we were very much aware of. Another part of that had to do with the high school environment. The priests at Mount Carmel were socially progressive and were constantly getting into conflict with the extremely conservative, downright reactionary cardinal, Cardinal [James Francis] McIntyre, who was the Archbishop of Los Angeles at the time. Continually being chastised because they would go out, the priests from Mount Carmel, would go out to the different parishes and say [Sunday] mass, and they would give pro-civil rights sermons. In particular, I think in 1964 there was a proposition on the ballot to overturn a fair housing law. The priests talked about that to us; it was an item for discussion in their sermons. This idea of racial equality was something that was basic of what was going on in my high school. Left unsaid in elementary school, but very explicit in the high school. So that was important. To the extent that there was a discussion about war—I graduated high school in 1965, and the buildup had just started. It didn't really become much of an issue until I went to [college]. But Mount Carmel was a progressive school. It was a pretty good place, where I essentially got a sense for social activism. The grape strike was just beginning to take off, and again, I wasn't conscious of it, I don't think, in high school. Again, it was in '65 that it took off.

But like I said, we read a lot, and read newspapers and we got *Time* magazine. I don't remember the year that [Cesar] Chavez made it onto the cover of *Time* magazine, but that was just a *huge* thing. I'd never seen anything like that. We knew about Edward Roybal, we knew about other things that were going on in state and county politics, but that awareness really began more broadly—and about the war—after '65. After I graduated from high school.

Holmes: Well, let's go next to talking about your undergraduate years and attending college. Now, you entered California State University Dominguez Hills. Did you enter right out of high school, in 1965?

01-00:23:18

Escobar: No. I went to junior college, El Camino College, which was in Lawndale, or sort of an unincorporated area. My brother had started school there and like I said, didn't finish. But I went through. To be quite honest, an impetus for staying in college, by the time I got there, I knew that I had to maintain grades and maintain credit hours to keep my draft deferment. So again, I would say that to the extent that there was discussion in our home about the war, it was about making sure that I didn't get drafted. And I went right along with that. In fact, that sort of led to a broader attitude of seeing the war in a negative fashion. But no, I started at El Camino. In terms of the faculty, I had a few women teachers; there were no Latinos [except my Spanish teacher, Ms. Bernal I believe, who was a Latina]; I don't remember any black professors. It was primarily white males. In the history classes that I took, they were all white males.

My intent at the time, and my ambition, was to be a high school history teacher. I loved reading history. That's all I really expected to do all through college, actually. So I was a history major from the get-go. After two years at El Camino, I moved on to Dominguez Hills, where again, I was a history major. You had to take another field, an interdisciplinary field, and that's where the American studies came in. Dominguez Hills was a much more integrated area. I don't know, it's located sort of right next to Compton. By this time, it had moved. I knew they'd started up in Palos Verdes, but by this time, they were at their present location in Compton, Dominguez Hills, that particular area. Again, there was a broad diversity in the student body. First, I would say, there was an emerging African American activism. There was a BSU [Black Student Union] and we hung out together. I knew those people. I was there from '67, graduated in '69. By 1969, there was a developing Chicano presence. There was a UMAS, United Mexican American Students, that would become MEChA after the *El Plan de Santa Bárbara*. That change didn't happen until after that. During all this time, I was working, usually about thirty hours a week. So I had pretty much almost a full-time job. I yell at students since then about, keep it to fifteen, and certainly, no more than twenty. But I was working thirty hours a week, taking a full load. Well, hey, there was time to play and there was activism and playing came together, especially in the later years. I wasn't particularly active, other than being in



UMAS and MEChA and hanging out with those things. In terms of the faculty, again, there were more women on the faculty at Dominguez Hills, even in history. But until Rudy [Rodolfo] Acuña showed up sometime in my final year—I took a class from him—I'd never seen a Chicano professor. Oh, that's not true. I did have a woman who taught Spanish at El Camino. Other than that, there was no role model there.

Holmes: I had the pleasure of interviewing Rudy earlier this year. And in doing that research, I became aware that he did spend time at Dominguez Hills. Which leads me to a question about diversity. We know that the student body, and slowly even the faculty, started to diversify. Was the curriculum beginning to diversify as well? Because I know Rudy went to Dominguez Hills to start helping create the curriculum for Chicano studies.

01-00:29:33

Escobar:

That's right, he did. We all gravitated towards Rudy. Rudy's a dynamic, charismatic guy. He was really important to us, and important to me in a variety of ways. He was immensely important in my development, in my intellectual development. As I said, I'd grown up hearing a lot; but the reading that you did then—I'd never seen a Chicano history book up until then. There weren't none. There was very little out. I didn't know about George Sanchez or Américo Paredes or Ernesto Galarza. Maybe Galarza a little bit, from my folks. But I didn't know about those people until, really, graduate school, and that took off. We were hungry for literature at the time. But among the things that you mention, *El Grito* and things like that, those were things that were occurring here [Berkeley] and in other places, that had not yet entered our consciousness until Rudy showed up. And that was really just in the last year. He was formative for me, and for many of us, actually. The student body was, as I said, changing. By this time, there was a strong anti-war contingent; there was a small SDS [Students for a Democratic Society]; there was a bigger BSU, and they were very active. UMAS, and later, MEChA took off. By the time I graduated in '69, the president of the associated students was in fact a Chicana. There were negotiations for doing things like developing EOP [Educational Opportunity Program], developing more curriculum. That was just taking off in '68, '69, when I was there. There's no doubt that an impetus for that was what was occurring in East Los Angeles in the blowouts of '68.

01-00:32:33

We didn't talk about the extended family, which I think is important. So I'm moving geographically from South LA to Boyle Heights, where our extended family lived. So the story of my mother, very quickly, is that she migrated with her mother, and her mother's first cousin came from Durango to the United States. I never met any of these people; they all died before I was born. They came to the United States. But again, this is the lore. They came to the United States in the 1920s. They were women that were fleeing the revolution and the mayhem of the revolution. So you had these two first cousins, who then had children and down the line. It was these cousins—now, three, four,

five times removed; I don't know how removed they were—that were our extended family. They all lived in Boyle Heights. So I was pretty familiar with Brooklyn Avenue, which is now Cesar Chavez. Because of everybody's Catholicism, they all went to Catholic schools. I can't think of any of them that went to places like Roosevelt or Lincoln. Well, Roosevelt would be the public school in Boyle Heights. Some of them went to Salesian. Girls, some of my cousins, went to Sacred Heart, which is more sort of downtown. They weren't involved, but they knew. You could not be in East LA in 1968 and not know what was going on. It was straight out of there. So that informed me. That, along with Rudy and my impact from my family, and then the earlier context of the political progressive, you would call it today, but non-communist. Not particularly anti-communist, but non-communist progressivism. That's my term for describing Roybal, but that comes much later in my own studies. So I knew what was going on there, but it wasn't until I got into college that I started getting involved in those kinds of things.

Holmes: Well, talking about your extended family and Boyle Heights—that's where you began, right after graduation, teaching high school.

01-00:35:52  
Escobar:

At Salesian.

Holmes: Yes. I think it's really interesting. One of the things Rudy Acuña always stressed is that Chicano studies is not just always about scholarship. Foremost, he was a very firm advocate that it's also about teaching. Your experience in this oral history, in these two sessions, really gives us a very unique balance of both; of that experience of teaching and working in administration with students.

01-00:36:25  
Escobar:

And curriculum building.

Holmes: Yes indeed. So I wanted to talk about some of these experiences, before we move on to the development of the field and your graduate studies. So you taught at Salesian High School for, was it about a year?

01-00:36:42  
Escobar:

One year.

Holmes: Talk about that if you will—your experience there.

01-00:36:45  
Escobar:

It cured me of wanting to be a high school teacher. That, and taking an education course, it cured me of that. I don't know what it was at the time, but [Salesian had] gotten some money to do this developmental, remedial reading. Again, it's an all-boys school. They were getting a lot of kids into the school who couldn't read. This started at the ninth grade. I had five sessions a day with a very small number of students. Because it was federal money, it was

limited to no more than twenty people at a time. I was woefully inadequate and unprepared to teach these things, so everything was bootstraps, just trying to figure out what would work. I did as much reading as I could on how to teach people to read. Nobody had a reading level of higher than the sixth grade. There was a book called *Shuck Loves Chirley* that sort of talked a little bit about that. It was written by another Chicano, Leonard Olguin. Someone that I think Rudy put me in touch with, or at least made me aware of. Rudy was really foundational for me. So I went in and taught these classes. Again, it was by the seat of my pants. I read to them, made them read, never shamed them. I kind of ran a very relaxed classroom. But I knew I had to be somewhat authoritarian because I'd gone to an all-boys Catholic school and I knew how rambunctious those kids could be. I had to admit I was surprised when they actually listened to me and I could be an authority figure; but that's another story.

This was 1970 and those were the second walkouts at Roosevelt. You could hear the helicopters going over both schools, making circles around in the neighborhood. It was a very tense time to be there. I graduated in '69 from Dominguez Hills, got this job there, so it was '69 and '70. By this time, I was much more involved in stuff. I had much more time to do what I wanted to do. I was going to demonstrations, I was involved in those kinds of things. But again, not in a leadership way. Was also involved at Dominguez Hills. I continued to take classes, and as I said, that one education course pretty much did me in for teaching high school. And it became more and more evident, not just what was going on in the schools, but also what was going on between law enforcement and the community. I remember going to demonstrations at the East LA Sheriff's substation. It became very evident from people that I hung out with, that the sheriffs and the LAPD were someone to be afraid of and someone that was causing them an awful lot of trouble.

01-00:40:51

By this time, Rudy had begun the program at Northridge, and several of us would go and visit him. So we got to know those people, got to know Raul Ruiz, got to know other people on the faculty there, and again, started doing, by this time, more and more reading on my own. All while I was teaching high school in this thing that had nothing to do with activism, war, or history, and at a school where any idea of radicalism, especially from the priests or activists, they were very much afraid of that. The final falling out I had with the principal, they were upset that because I ran a relaxed classroom, I didn't uphold the discipline standards. We had a carpet like we have in here, and the boys could sit down on the floor and read, which they did. And I would read to them. I didn't care whether they wore belts or not, or their shirts were untucked or whatever. The priest got very upset with me and said, "You have to understand, these boys are a bunch of animals." There were two Latino, Mexican, priests. After one year, I knew I wasn't going to be there anymore, and they didn't want me back, even though my students—when they took the tests at the end of the year, the average for my students' improvement was 3.5

grades. I would read them the sports page; I think I read them *Huck Finn* [*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*]. So I was effective in my own uninformed way.

Holmes: I wanted to ask you about UC Irvine, but is there any final thoughts on your high school teaching experience?

01-00:43:19

Escobar: Well, just that working there, even if it was a Catholic school—it wasn't involved in the blowouts or the second walkouts—I really got a sense of the siege mentality that the community was in at that time. I sort of knew from my cousins. But working with these boys, these young men, who would talk to me about the things that were going on, hearing the helicopters, the kind of harassment they got from police, stories about being picked up by cops. They came from Evergreen area and being dropped off in another area, just because they knew they would get beat up or something like that, by the gang in the other barrio. All those kinds of things, again, had an impact on me. I grew up, again, living in South Central. The Watts riots—we didn't talk about that.

Holmes: No, I wanted to ask you about that.

01-00:44:32

Escobar: I know, yeah. Boy, we were right in the middle of it.

Holmes: That was right after you graduated.

01-00:44:45

Escobar: Graduated from high school, yeah.

Holmes: Yeah, yeah.

01-00:44:47

Escobar: I remember—it was the time between high school and starting college—I was literally on the beach, I think in Manhattan Beach, and I could see fires. This was on a Thursday; I didn't know what was going on. I was working at a paint store at the time, which was over on Western, right off of Slauson. I don't know how well you know LA, but this was also in the so-called riot area. I knew that this thing was beginning to take off. The incident that sparked it was a couple of blocks from where I went to grammar school. Say that was maybe a quarter mile, or half mile at the most, from my parents' house. I could see flames from my bedroom window. We were a block off of Main. When the National Guard arrived on Friday, boy, it was a tense area. Nobody bothered us. My father was literally taking the bus. My mother was working downtown in Newberry's, and my father went and picked her up from the bus and brought her back. But eventually, we decided it was time. I think we left on Saturday morning of the riots, and moved into the home of my brother's in-laws, who were out of town, and stayed there for a few days, until we moved back. Then it was pretty amazing to see the stores that we had shopped at.

Everything burned down. My folks moved out a couple of years after that, when my sister came home one day. We had had a couple of break-ins and burglaries, all after the riots. My sister walked in the front door while somebody was going out the back door, who had burglarized our house. She was in high school at the time. At that point, they decided to move out.

The riots, to me, were impactful in the sense that, again, the conflict between police and, in this case, the African American community was evident. I think I might be projecting back what I've learned from my own research now since, but I do recall Martin Luther King [Jr.] coming to Los Angeles; the ongoing antagonism, in particular, Bill [William] Parker. They were claiming that there was no discrimination in Los Angeles. Nothing was going on. I grew up there; I knew what was going on. I knew how those cops were. So again, it impacted me. I certainly didn't know I was going to be writing a dissertation on that at the time. But in the long-term, I think it sparked in me an interest, at some point, in understanding why there is so much antagonism. When I thought about it afterwards, when I was beginning to pick a dissertation topic, I think being there for Watts was important.

Holmes: Well, I'm glad we were able to cover that because I know it was on my list, and particularly that you lived there in the area.

01-00:49:14

Escobar: Oh, yeah. You could see—just the physical change of the built environment was amazing. And the things that happened as a result. The other lesson that I learned is the things that came afterwards. Now the city had to start paying attention. Again, this is me thinking and talking more as a historian. But I remember noticing, oh, gosh, they built a hospital half a mile away, that had never been there. Where my sister and I were born was essentially downtown Los Angeles, because there were really no great hospitals there. Now you see hospitals being built, you see money going into programs for community development, you see all kinds of things—essentially, what we would now call the War on Poverty—developing. To a certain extent, I remember thinking there was a cause-and-effect relationship there. So my analysis, ill-formed at the time—or not ill-formed, but non-formed at the time—was that violence worked.

Holmes: So after your year of high school, you take a position at UC Irvine, as the assistant dean of students. Were you still living in your same neighborhood at this time, or did you move to Irvine?

01-00:51:07

Escobar: I then moved. I moved to Orange County. There were no dorms at Dominguez Hills; certainly, not at the community college. I lived at home up until the time I moved to Irvine. By the way, one of the wonderful things about college during all those years was that it was free. A community college, there were no fees at all. All I had to do was buy books. I remember paying fees at

Dominguez Hills. They're on the quarter system. It was twenty-five dollars a quarter, plus books. So it was free. We could not have afforded what students are paying now.

So, UC Irvine. After the year at Salesian, I realized I didn't want to do that. I had now become engaged pretty full-form in the Chicano movement, doing a lot of things. Being involved in, again, more as a foot soldier; certainly not taking anything like a leadership position. Stayed in contact with Rudy Acuña; met other people along the way. EOP was just getting started. I was an assistant dean of students, but focusing primarily on admissions and educational opportunity, the Educational Opportunity Program at Irvine. Got there, it was a tiny school at the time. The way the program was divided up, it was divided up into student services for students already there, as well as recruitment, going out to the schools and encouraging people to go to school. Worked closely with admissions folks and other folks in the UC system. You asked how I got the job. My best recollection is, I was looking around for a job. I don't know how I found out about it, but I applied, interviewed, and got it. I was hunting around for other things to do. I interviewed with McDonald's, to becoming an assistant manager with one of them, just to make ends meet. But I applied for the job. It was transformational for me personally, in the sense that I realized the university was a great environment for me to be in, that I could have some impact, that I could do some things there that were impactful. That I could, in this case, help students.

It was a very tense two years, because there was a great deal of Chicano-Black conflict going on. The director of the EOP program was African American. He insisted that there were equal numbers of Black and Chicanos, at least equal number admitted. I forget exactly what the details of the argument were. The UCs have service areas. And the service area in Orange County was overwhelmingly Chicano, as opposed to Black. So we had knock-down-drag-out fights about this. I learned from that that I would never allow that to happen again. But I was in the middle of that then and you had to fight. I was there for two years, until I went to graduate school. But it was impactful, in the sense that I realized that the university was a place where I could be. It was a place where I could have some impact, in terms of helping students and working with them. But I realized that as a staff member, that wasn't going to happen, that I had to go on and get higher education.

01-00:56:21

It was also important in the sense that it put me in connection—through the UC coordinating committee—with people like Juan Gómez-Quiñones, and Mario García and Mario Barrera. All of those, because staff and faculty would come together. Carlos Muñoz was there at the time, so Carlos and I became friends. So I made contacts with these people, and it got me starting to think more about both higher education issues, but also what role I was going to play. History was still my first love. I couldn't see taking educational administration classes. I continued to read on my own, and a more disciplined

way of looking at it was going into graduate school. So I hunted around for graduate schools. I really wasn't planning on leaving Southern California. You sort of asked that question. Santa Barbara with Jesus Chavarria was a possibility, but they were always in such turmoil. So much infighting going on there that it just did not seem like a place to be. I wasn't all that interested in doing labor history, which was what was coming out of UCLA and Juan's students. In particular, I became friends with Luis Arroyo. He's at Cal State Long Beach now. He and I became friends, partly because his dissertation—which never became anything, and I'm sad of it—it was on the furniture workers union and I put him in touch with my dad. So I sort of got integrated into both the historians and higher education. I hunted around and Riverside was an amicable place. They had a good faculty, and particularly, they had Carlos Cortés. I think he was running the Chicano studies unit. I think it was a program at the time. Yeah. They didn't have any of their own independent faculty. But he was also a historian. He was a Latin Americanist, a Brazilianist by training, but he was an excellent editor. So, I went and met with him, got a fellowship to go to school there, and started there.

Holmes: And that was in 1972 that you started?

01-00:59:47

Escobar: Yeah. So '69 to '70 at Salesian, '70 to '72 at Irvine. The other thing that the Irvine experience was good for me is that I now had administrative experience; I knew how to write a memo.

Holmes: Well, I want to talk about your graduate experience. But before we get there, I wanted to have you reflect a little bit on the state of Chicano studies around this time.

01-01:00:13

Escobar: Again, up until that year at Salesian, I hadn't thought about it in any coherent way. I wasn't thinking about where it was, because I was going to be a high school teacher and that curriculum was very constricted. It wasn't until I got started, until I went to graduate school, that I started reading something deeper than Carey McWilliams or whatever other books. I would just pick up things to read. *The Decline of the Californios* [*The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-speaking Californians, 1846-1890*] by Leonard Pitt, and whatever else I had my hands on. I don't think I learned about *El Grito—Aztlán* was just getting going when I got there. But they were formative. So I was beginning to understand. Then knowing Rudy. Rudy, again, was very instrumental in getting me to go to graduate school. I think he advised me to go to Riverside. So I knew the things that he was doing. But again, in terms of an area of study, it was premature for me. I hadn't yet focused on it and started thinking about it in any coherent way until, really, a couple of years going through the history, doing the basic things in history to pass exams and getting ready for those. Also meeting my wife to be and getting married. But again, I don't think I really started thinking about it in a

coherent way until I had to start doing it. That's the thing about teaching, right? You really don't learn a field until you've got to do it. That was the case for me.

When I went to Riverside, I told folks and made sure that I joined MEChA. I said, "I'm a member. I occasionally might come to a meeting. But what you can call on me to do is to move tables, make tacos, do whatever you need for me to do." I said I wouldn't go to meetings. I'm not going to get involved in other things, because graduate education was my focus at the time. It wasn't until I started taking classes from Carlos and others there that I began to think of it in a more coherent fashion. Again, at that point, I started teaching. Again, I interacted with people in other places. I went to conferences. NACCS—the National Association, first of just Chicano studies, and later, Chicana and Chicano studies—was just getting off the ground. That, in the future, would become very important for me, as I moved on. But in those early years, I was getting through graduate school, trying to understand my own education and what I needed to do. I chose US history as my major field—you could do either colonial to the Civil War or US starting at the revolution forward—and Latin America as a second field. By this time, I was doing Chicano history, not Chicano studies. You couldn't understand Mexican Americans without understanding Mexico.

Holmes: Well, if we think of some of the pioneering literature that, of course, you came to later in your studies—so Carey McWilliams, Ernesto Galarza, George Sánchez, even Paul Taylor—

01-01:05:18  
Escobar:

Oh, yeah.

Holmes: —what were some of those early works that really struck you? Again, it could be later in graduate school. But some of those early works, even as you're digging into the field, that you begin to appreciate?

01-01:05:29  
Escobar:

Well, yeah, right. McWilliams is foundational. Rudy came out with the first *Occupied America* a couple of years later. Paul Taylor was crucial. Manuel Gamio was important for understanding that immigrant generation that was my family. Pitt, on *Decline of the Californios*. Again, I didn't think about it. Everything was foundational at the time. Things were just beginning to take off for me. Started reading *Aztlán*, in particular. I knew those people because I had come to know Juan [Gómez-Quiñones] and Emilio Zamora, who's now in Austin. We had great times together, and talked an awful lot. Juan was really important to me, and encouraging all the way along. But it's those early scholars—I read Galarza, I read Gamio, I read George Sanchez and those things. But I think, maybe with the exception of McWilliams, there was an arrogance that was there at the time, that what we were doing was something new. In the Chicano movement, it's something that I've resolved for myself.



That was stupid of me, and like I said, arrogant. But what those other people were writing about—I didn't understand their impact on what we were doing at the time. At least not the first time that I read them, because my experience was not deep. It wasn't until later that I could go back and take a look at some of those other folks and say, "Oh, yeah." Again, it really wasn't until I started teaching that I really engaged the work in a critical manner.

Holmes: You've mentioned a number of times how important Rudy Acuña was for you. Then you're starting graduate school in 1972, the same year that his book *Occupied America* came out. Did you read it that year, right when it came out?

01-01:08:50

Escobar: Yes. It's still there. I looked at it yesterday.

Holmes: Oh, really?

01-01:08:54

Escobar: I just wanted to take a look. It's there. When we moved and I lost a campus office and moved into a much smaller house, I got rid of a lot of books. That's not one that I got rid of because it's foundational. It provided a perspective with the internal colonial model. So I was reading Rudy. I was reading Mario Barrera, I was reading his internal colonial model. I was reading [Karl] Marx, I was reading [Antonio] Gramsci. I was, again, trying to get a sense around all of these things. I'll tell you; I didn't know what I was getting into when I went to graduate school. I had no idea.

Holmes: I don't think any of us do, half the time.

01-01:09:51

Escobar: Well, some people might. Especially if they came from a highly educated family. But I had no clue. I just sort of sat down and started working. At this point, I was building foundations. It was on the bottom floor and I was trying to build up. It wasn't until later that these things came together for me in a coherent manner. But I had to put together curriculum, for example.

Holmes: Well, I know we've mentioned the *Plan de Santa Bárbara* in 1969. As you were saying, you had a lot of things going on at that time. Did you know about this event?

01-01:10:43

Escobar: I knew what was going on. I knew a bunch of people that went.

Holmes: Talk about that if you will—your recollections and observations.

01-01-10:49

Escobar: Well, they were EOP people. They were building curriculum. It wasn't until later, when the thing came out—I was actually at Irvine and I got a copy of the Plan—I still have that, too—and I sat down and read it and said, "Oh, now

I understand." Again, it was reading that, actually the Plan itself, that allowed me to understand better what it is that we were going to do. That turned a key for me, at least in terms of my thinking. I had a roommate for a while, while I was at Irvine, who had been there. We talked about the kinds of things that were going on. Again, it was in the middle of all this other conflict and EOP and administration. But still, I was beginning to understand the interdisciplinary nature of what we were doing. It is what got me interested in reading outside of what I needed to do for graduate school, even then. But they came back, and the main thing that occurred from that was the change in name from UMAS to MEChA, and that now there was an impetus to create some kind of Chicano studies at Dominguez Hills. Rudy had come and gone. I think he was only there the one year, so I had some of that. They hired a couple of others, one a historian from whom I took a class. He didn't last. I forget; I don't know what happened to him. But by this time, I had graduated, so I didn't have the benefit of that. It was, again, not until I got to Riverside that I began to engage with some of those other ideas. Again, it was a developmental stage for me.

Holmes: In a similar view, just as the Plan comes out and begins to, in a sense, lay the foundation in a variety of fronts for the discipline, we also have journals starting to come out and carve out some of that intellectual space. *El Grito* came out in 1967, here from Berkeley. But then as you've mentioned, *Aztlán: the Chicano Journal of Social Science and the Arts*, which was under Juan's direction there at UCLA—

01-01:13:44

Escobar: Right.

Holmes: —and in 1970, that same year, *The Journal of Mexican American History*, out of Santa Barbara.

01-01:13:50

Escobar: Yes. I read those. I remember the articles. There was an article that Juan [Gómez-Quiñones] wrote. I think it's the third issue of *Aztlán*, on the state of Chicano history. I sat down and read that. That, again, was foundational for me. It was a place that I could go to, I subscribed to the journals that I could read in a variety of different areas. It was still very social science-based. The history fit into that; literature and the arts still didn't get the attention that folks believed that it deserved and that it did deserve. Again, for me at least, I learned from the people who came just before me. Juan in particular was there. A student leader, as a graduate student, did everything early on. But by this time, he had become an established figure and was publishing work in a variety of areas. His stuff on politics and labor were just beginning to take off. His book on the Magóns was published; he'd done some other work, a pamphlet on the Chicano student movement that we used; and *Aztlán*, articles. Oh, the articles there sort of started filling in the gaps for me and it was more important. *El Grito* had a short life, right? *The Journal of Mexican American*

*History*, I also got. But those were the main ones that influenced me during those years.

Holmes: A lot of students who were in your shoes around the same time have mentioned that there was this feeling that you were doing something very new.

01-01:16:12

Escobar: Right.

Holmes: Did these journals give some academic legitimacy? That in a sense, we're not on an island just by ourselves; that this is a field, this is worthy of publishing?

01-01:16:29

Escobar: I don't think I understood journals. I knew the *Journal of American History*, I knew *The American Historical Review*, I knew that there were other journals out there; but I didn't understand the field well enough in those years to be able to say, oh, this is important. How a journal gave legitimacy to the field, I didn't think of it at that time, in that particular fashion. Later, yes. But not at this particular time, because again, I had no larger understanding of how disciplines were formed or what I was doing. It was pretty foundational. I was the first member in my extended family to have a higher education. Very first one that ever did that. So I didn't understand at that particular time. That development came later.

It was later that we started building institutions, trying to understand more of what was going on. But in graduate school, we were just barely getting started. You noted in your outline, the *Chicano Chronicle*, which was just something that I fell into, thanks to Carlos Cortés. He was everybody's super editor. I remember meeting Albert Camarillo, going to his office. I think we had lunch or something, together with Carlos, because everybody was taking manuscripts to Carlos to read; Luis Arroyo, various people would do that. Even Rudy spoke well about him, and they were very different in many ways. But the *Chicano Chronicle* was an attempt to start building a curriculum for those high school kids that I had taught a year or so before.

Holmes: Right. Yeah. And this was based out of Claremont, is that correct?

01-01:19:27

Escobar: It was a Ford Foundation grant that people at Claremont had gotten together. Well, let's see. There was a guy. Oh, what is his name? [Robert Miller]. Whoever the editor was. I'd have to go back and look. He had come up with this idea that you were going to develop curriculum for high school students—Chicano history for high school students—and the way to do this was to put it in journalistic form. Write it up as a newspaper. He didn't know anything about Chicano history. I knew more than him; goes to show how little he knew. So again, he had gone to Carlos to ask for his assistance and advice. By this time, I was coming into my second year. He shifted me off of the

fellowship and put me onto this job, and we sat down and wrote curriculum. I don't think much became of that in the high schools. High schools weren't ready to adopt that kind of stuff yet. But again, it put me in better touch with primary sources. I could work here, I could work various different places, doing research for that.

Holmes: You had mentioned during your time in college, that you became a little more involved in the Chicano movement, in various groups. Again, at this time—as we were talking about earlier in our interview—civil rights and social justice, various movements were beginning to bubble up while you were in high school. Then certainly, by the time you were in college—

01-01:21:47

Escobar: All hell broke loose.

Holmes: That's probably a good way to put it. How did you see these facets of social activism influencing the field? Among not just you and your fellow students, fellow graduate students, but also in looking at mentors like Rudy, who were involved from the very beginning?

01-01:22:10

Escobar: Well, without a doubt. There is no better piece of evidence, no better document than the mission statement for NACCS, which states that it's not scholarship for its own sake; it's scholarship to bring about social change. It is something that I believe in to this day. If you take a look at what I wrote in developing the Chicano Studies Department at ASU, that's what I'm saying we're doing. I think we *do* talk about social change. We're getting way ahead of ourselves, but Carlos Vélez-Ibañez and I talk about developing intellectual warriors to be able to go out and do that. And that has been a constant in my own thinking about the field and what we're supposed to be doing. It's not far afield from what the liberal arts and sciences are, broadly speaking, supposed to do. The whole idea of a liberal arts education is to prepare citizens and make good citizens. That's what we're doing. Part of what I was doing is creating people who could have an impact on that community, have knowledge to bring about social change in ways. That's what I see; that's what I essentially have devoted myself to over the years. So yes, the movement was crucially important, not just to me, but to a whole generation of scholars. To the extent that Rudy is critical of where the field has gone. It's because he believes that people have left that behind. And there's an extent I agree with him; but I'm not as adamant as I've heard him be.

Holmes: Well, we've talked a little bit about your graduate years at UC Riverside and you discussed the reasons for choosing Riverside. I wanted to ask about Riverside itself. Today, if we look at UC Riverside, it's probably one of the most diverse campuses in the country. We live in one of the most diverse states, so that usually puts us higher on the ranking. What was your view of, stepping on to campus as a graduate student, the student body there? Was it as

diverse then? Or was it still, in comparison to other campuses you've been on, was it growing in diversity?

01-01:25:51

Escobar: There was a strong Chicano community there. There were people on staff and on the faculty, like Carlos Cortés. But also there was a strong group of students who were active. One of the things that I sort of missed as a graduate student is that your work becomes very small. Right?

Holmes: It does.

01-01:26:19

Escobar: I don't know where you went to undergrad. But how much did you know about Yale, other than the history department? Right?

Holmes: Right.

01-01:26:30

Escobar: You don't have a broad view. But to the extent that I could see, there was a strong Chicano community. When I started there, there were a few other Chicano graduate students. Not enough to form an organization at the time, but there were three of us in the history department that started together. Two of us finished; one of us didn't. So we formed a group. But it was clear that the campus community was strongly linked to the various communities in the area, in the Inland Empire in particular. Obviously, Riverside, the Casa Blanca. One of the things that was influential to me, again going back, looking at the police, was that there were police shootings of a couple of Chicanos in the Casa Blanca area of Riverside. I remember going to community meetings on that. But I also knew that other things were going on in San Bernardino and Colton and the other parts of the Inland Empire. So what I'm saying is that the community that was there on campus also had links to the broader community. I knew that Carlos was doing different things. There were other people that were doing different things in the community and on campus, and it was through those efforts that more things were happening on campus, more diversity in faculty. Eventually, they hired Tomás Rivera as chancellor. He was in literature and wrote this famous book on farmworkers. It's a piece of literature; it's a novel. *And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*. They have a center for him at the Claremont Colleges now, in his name.

Holmes: So UC Riverside was a burgeoning and vibrant community for a Chicano scholar. You were starting to make networks with other graduate students, as well as mentors and advisors there. Discuss that environment a bit. So you worked with Carlos—

01-01:30:09

Escobar: Yeah, primarily. But again, people in the history department, a little bit outside history. Hal Bridges was a Civil War historian. Because Carlos was a Latin Americanist, he couldn't—the US field was what I was in. But Bob

[Robert] Hine was crucial in so many ways for me, and my development in understanding the West. I was his TA. He, both in terms of his manner, the kind of a person he was—he was blind at the time when I was there—and in how I understood the West, were crucial to me. He gave lots of advice over the years I was there, in just how to negotiate the place. Hal Bridges. And there was Nathan Hale. He wrote a multi-volume biography of Sigmund Freud called *Freud in America*. Both of those people sort of retired early. Hal went off to live in Sedona. But Bob stayed on, and I was fortunate enough to be on campus when he'd had the operation that got his sight back.

So he was influential. But those were the historians. But then Carlos was really a wonderful editor. He was a wonderful mentor. The history department at Riverside went through some really hard times, pretty much after I left. There were the young bulls and there were the older people. They had a real culture problem in that department, including the way they treated women. They didn't treat Gayle [Gullett] badly, but certainly, other women were treated badly. But most of this happened after we left. Another person that I became friends with there is Camille Guérin-Gonzales. We were very close friends, and she crops up later in my life, when I was at ASU [Arizona State University]. But maybe that's for another story. But she was another one of Carlos' students. We were the only two that I think he ever hooded. He actually didn't get a chance to hood me, because I couldn't go back [to Riverside] at the time. But that was when I was at Mount Holyoke, when I finally graduated.

But the department became really dysfunctional. There was sexual harassment that went on. There was a suicide, later on, among the faculty. There was really ugly things, but that happened later. Luckily, I was there when it was pretty stable. We were a pretty coherent group. But those were the people. Those were the historians there that impacted me. There were people in economics. There were a couple of economic historians from whom I took classes and spoke with, gave me a broader understanding. But Carlos was a good mentor and he helped me navigate the difficulties of some of the people that were better to avoid on that campus. He was prescient, because it was exactly those kinds of people that ended up causing so much problems for the department. Great scandals occurred.

Holmes: You mentioned the Western historian Bob Hine. Al Camarillo had a similar experience at UCLA with Norris Hundley, who was also part of that movement within Western history of really broadening it, making it much more inclusive than just cowboys in flannel shirts and white hats. Was Bob Hine also within that fold of Western historians that supported the inclusion of Chicano history?

01-01:36:22  
Escobar:

One of the things that I remember him talking about, that stands with me to this day—. Anthony Bourdain's series is now streaming on Netflix. So I sat

down and watched one episode last night, and it was an episode on New Mexico. He starts by talking about the individual, the idea of the frontier and the cowboys out on the range by themselves, struggling and so on and so forth. So the thing that I learned from Bob that is impactful to this day was the communal nature. He wrote on community, right? I remember as his TA, sitting in his class listening to him and then working with students afterwards, about how that's a myth. Even the trappers, everything was done in community. But the point is, in my understanding, not just of Western history but of history in general, Bob was very influential.

Also the kind of person to be a mentor. I learned from Rudy, linking scholarship and teaching to activism, to having an impact on the community. I learned from Carlos and Bob how to be a mentor, how to guide students at both the undergraduate and graduate level, to get them to do their best and to help them make decisions. I hear back from students. When they come back and talk to me about that, that's very important. I think I learned how to do that from those two people. Rudy was very good in a variety of ways; but how to work more intimately with students and to help them in times of crisis and helping them make decisions are things that I learned from both those men.

No women. The women in that department were treated awfully. There were just some horrible incidents that occurred. More of them later, but even while we were there.

Holmes: You were starting to talk a little bit about networks and that you met Juan and others. A lot of people have discussed that when we look at the field, there was already these kind of two centers that were beginning to emerge—one at UCLA, one at UT Austin—and that Juan and Américo Paredes began to link both of those. I think Al Camarillo talked of it as the California-Texas axis.

01-01:40:47

Escobar: Yeah, right. Yeah.

Holmes: I know that Juan loved to bring in other students from other campuses down, and was very open about that, that UCLA was a place to gather.

01-01:41:02

Escobar: Oh, UCLA. Not Austin particularly, because again, funds, if nothing else. I did a good part of my research at UCLA. Campbell Hall, when they were in Campbell Hall, was a very hospitable place to be. When I won a Ford postdoc, that was the logical place, in the eighties, for me to at least do part of my work. It was where I met and became friends with people like Luis and Emilio and a variety of other people. Those friendships were then sustained in later years, through NACCS. Santa Barbara to a certain extent; but primarily there at UCLA, was a place where you could go. You'd go to lectures. There was a shuttle that went from Riverside there, so if there was something going on

there—if there were talks, if there were conferences—often I could go and did.

Holmes: Well, I wanted to talk a little bit about your scholarship and dissertation.

01-01:42:47

Escobar: Yeah, sure. But if we're going to talk about the little anthology, there isn't much to say about that. People got nominated to be on a committee in NACCS. I served on that committee. We read manuscripts, made a few decisions. Essentially, they were proceedings. We cleaned things up a little bit and you got a pub. I don't remember rejecting anything. So there wasn't much there. Publishing, for me, didn't really begin until I got the job in Indiana.

Holmes: Well, first of all, the anthology, which was published in 1983, *History, Culture, and Society: Chicano Studies in the 1980s*. This is based off the National Association of Chicano Studies, which wasn't the original name when it was formed in 1972, but the name the organization took a few years later.

01-01:44:07

Escobar: Social science was in there.

Holmes: Yeah, National Association of Chicano Social Scientists (NACSS).

01-01:44:10

Escobar: Yeah. I didn't start going to those meetings until probably the mid-seventies.

Holmes: Okay. So you were on a committee in NACS?

01-01:44:55

Escobar: Yeah.

Holmes: What other conferences, during those graduate years, did you also attend?

01-01:45:00

Escobar: I went to PCBs [Pacific Coast Branch – American Historical Association]. I would attend if they were close. Again, if they were local, I would attend conferences in the Southern California area. Probably a PCB. Might've been a Western; I don't recall. I didn't do anything. It was the first conference that I went to. It might've been the second or third year. Carlos Cortés said, "You need to do this." Conferences, I didn't know. "You go to this conference. You're going to be doing something at these places eventually, so you better go see how this happens." I think it was in San Diego. And I think I went to a NACS; I'm trying to remember. But again, I didn't know much.

Holmes: It wasn't your focus.

01-01:45:52

Escobar: It wasn't what I was doing just yet.



Holmes: Well, it's important to point out—the anthology comes out in 1983, and this is, in a sense, ten years since the organization was founded. It's also important to point out that NACS at this time had one C. It was just Chicano studies; we hadn't brought in Chicana/Chicano studies yet.

01-01:46:20

Escobar: But the changing of the name came about as a result of women who came together in a caucus during one of the conferences. This is when I was going to those conferences regularly, because those were my years at Stanford. So I remember it very clearly. They came together, they demanded inclusivity of language, and it was only right that they got it. Yeah.

Holmes: But so the interesting thing that I found about this anthology was that in many respects, the subtitle of *Chicano Studies in the 1980s*, is that it's ten years. So after a decade of, in a sense, kind of forming a discipline—we have a journal, we have an organization—that they're starting to take stock of where Chicano studies came from, and then begin to discuss where it's going.

01-01:47:41

Escobar: Yes. I think that is beginning. To a certain extent, we started taking stock quite early. You point out the 1973 PHR [*Pacific Historical Review*]. There's also Juan's piece in *Aztlán*—I think it's the third volume—his piece on the status of Chicano history. Taking stock immediately of it was something that we started to do. Again, that might've been more a theme of the conference, but it didn't emerge pretty much here. Even for those people who we published and who are published in that. These were refereed articles. I can't remember anything, a single piece that was in there. I don't even know if I still have the journal. It might've been one of the things that didn't make the move.

Holmes: The interesting thing about this little anthology is it's not just an interesting lens into the past of a field beginning to take stock and grapple with questions that we're still grappling with today, in many respects. But also the editors who were involved.

01-01:50:36

Escobar: I should've looked at it.

Holmes: Mario García joins you as editor.

01-01:50:44

Escobar: Yeah, Mario.

Holmes: Mario Barrera, Francisco Lomelí. And John Garcia

01-01:50:52

Escobar: It's a good group.

Holmes: So you're in some illustrious company.

01-01:50:55

Escobar:

You know, I know. I know each of those people well. John Garcia, the political scientist out of U of A. Mario and I are good friends, really good friends, and we spend a lot of time together. He ran a series that my first police book was done through. Rudy [Rodolfo] Torres, who is essentially a political economist working in Chicano studies at Irvine, is someone that I had recruited. I had recruited him with EOP to come to school, do his undergraduate work at Irvine. Then he went on and got a PhD, and now he's come back to Irvine and he's a prolific author in Chicano studies.

Mario's wife Ellen was at UMass, Rudy Torres was at Hampshire, and I was at Mount Holyoke for a year, and we formed our own little NACCS and we put together a conference at Mount Holyoke.

Holmes:

Oh, fantastic.

01-01:53:03

Escobar:

Yeah. Who did we invite out? He was in Spanish at Stanford, and then went to work at the Rockefeller. A wonderful, nice man. Oh, but that's, again—. Names are blanking on me now. I kept the poster for the longest time.

Holmes:

Well, and the last thing I wanted to say about this anthology is, it's not just the questions, the editors; but then also you look at the dedication. This volume is dedicated to Carey McWilliams, Ernesto Galarza, and Américo Paredes.

01-01:53:43

Escobar:

Yeah, right.

Holmes:

It was so fitting. To be honest, I was even telling people here at the Bancroft, that that copy should be here in the collection. We were discussing at the Ethnic Studies Library, when I was picking it up, that that will be a resource one of these days.

01-01:54:08

Escobar:

Yeah, I think it would be. That volume, coming together at that time. NACCS is ten years old, and well, for me, NACCS during those years, was a place where I was building networks. John was someone that I interacted with quite a bit when I went to ASU. And Mario all along. And—

Holmes:

Mario Barrera.

01-01:55:16

Escobar:

Talk about an influential book, his book on internal colonialism was important. But you see, he's a later generation, the same generation as Mario García, as Al. All these guys getting books out in 1979, the early eighties.

Holmes:

Yeah, early to mid-eighties.

01-01:55:41

Escobar:

Early to mid-eighties, okay. That's about right. So what I'm saying is that for me, it was more being able to work with these people, meeting other people. Cordelia Candelaria, who was at Colorado at the time, and some of those other women who were asserting themselves. I didn't have to learn feminism from them; I had Gayle and other women that I was friends with. But people like Cordelia in particular—it was from our association at NACCS that she knew me as head of the committee that hired me at ASU. So NACCS, in terms of broadening and deepening my thinking—the kinds of questions you were asking earlier—was deeply formational for me, starting at Stanford and particularly continuing during my years in Indiana, where I was the only Chicano with a PhD in the county.

Holmes:

Yeah.

01-01:58:19

Escobar:

By that time, I had learned the importance of an intellectual community. We formed one—it was myself, Louise Kerr, who was at Loyola of Chicago at the time; people up at Michigan State and other campuses, who formed the Midwest Council for Latino Studies? Maybe it was Chicano studies. I have to go back and look it up. But we formed an organization, got funding from our universities to bring together people, because there were a lot of isolated people at various campuses all over the Midwest. We had no one to talk to on our campuses who knew what we were doing.

Holmes:

Well, I want to get to that in our next session. Maybe now, because I know you need to eat, would be a good time stop and we can pick up with the dissertation and first book in our next session.

01-01:59:29

Escobar:

I had an embarrassing moment at the Western conference. It was my own embarrassment; he didn't do anything. In Portland a few years ago, I ran into Johnny [John Mack Faragher]. The reason I taught at Mount Holyoke was that I was a sabbatical replacement for Johnny. He got my name from Bob and Carlos Cortés, and I went there and I made friends. I had a great time there. He said he read my dissertation for his book on violence in L.A [*Eternity Street: Violence and Justice in Frontier Los Angeles*]. I'm going, "Jesus, I hope—" I really should do something about burying that. I had to look up the title. It's *Chicano Protest and the Law*. Yeah.

Holmes:

Yeah. Yeah, no, I was able to look it up too, but yeah. So maybe we'll pick up right there when we get together in our next session.

01-02:00:21

Escobar:

Okay. Okay.

Holmes:

Alright. Thanks, Ed.

## Interview 2: July 12, 2018

Holmes: All right. Well, this is Todd Holmes, with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is July 12, 2018, and I have the privilege of sitting down in our second session with Ed Escobar, for the Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project. We are here at the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley. Ed, thanks so much for sitting down.

02-00:00:25

Escobar: A pleasure to be here again, yes.

Holmes: Yes. Thank you. I wanted to pick up where we left off. I know in this session, we want to talk about your decades-long career, as well as your contributions and observations of the field developing. But we left off last time talking about your dissertation and the subsequent book. I think that would be a good place to pick up. The dissertation was titled "Chicano Protest and the Law: Law Enforcement Reactions to Chicano Activism in Los Angeles, 1850 to 1936" and the subsequent book, *Race, Police, and the Making of Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900 to 1945*. Now, this was the first history of the LAPD and the Chicano community in Los Angeles.

02-00:01:25

Escobar: Correct, yes.

Holmes: Talk a little bit about the genesis of this project and your aims of taking this on.

02-00:01:32

Escobar: Well, I think when we spoke last time, I spoke about growing up in Los Angeles. Growing up in Los Angeles in the 1950s and early '60s, which was the era of Bill Parker, the chief of police, which was ostensibly the most powerful person in the city. And having a police officer, someone who runs a department that can legitimately use force on citizens and can engage all kinds of activities—what that means for a society. [I was] watching the LAPD with not an analytical mind yet, through high school and college, there was enough that happened with the LAPD. I don't quite remember Bloody Christmas, which I write about later. But I certainly do remember reading—because we got the newspaper all the time in my house—about the Civil Rights Movement and various different incidents where police officers used excessive force, including shootings of citizens, black, brown, and white. So the police were always in the news and the LAPD was something I was aware of.

Once the Chicano movement got going, they became one of the primary issues that the movement addressed early on. The early movement was about educational reform. But quickly they'd butt heads with police, and you saw that in police reaction to the 1968 walkouts, the '70 walkouts. I think I spoke

about trying to teach at Salesian while having police helicopters flying overhead because of the demonstrations in close-by Roosevelt High School. Then there were also incidents in Riverside, where I was going to graduate school, including the killing of a young Mexican American man in the Casa Blanca neighborhood that was nearby. So it was an ongoing issue. Just before I started graduate school, we had the moratorium demonstration and the killing of Ruben Salazar. All the conflict that was there. So it was very clear that there was an antagonistic relationship between the police and the Chicano community. I think I needed to understand how that came about. I thought it would be instructive. I particularly wanted to understand what impact law enforcement had on the community. I wanted to write something—and this was on the urging of my excellent mentor, Carlos Cortés. I saw no value in writing a piece on police brutality, continuous accounts of police engaging in some kind of misconduct or other brutal behavior towards Chicanos or anybody else. There was little value in that. I also didn't want to engage in something that just focused on the victimization; and I also didn't want to write sort of a classic institutional history of the LAPD, such as Abraham Hoffman wrote about the Immigration Service during the Depression.

02-00:06:08

So I decided then to take a look at the way crime and law enforcement worked in Los Angeles. Like every silly young graduate student, I was going to write a dissertation that covered everything from the Mexican period—from 1821 to 1972 or something like that. Foolishly, I thought that's what I was going to do. So I picked the topic and I set about writing and did the research in various libraries—here at the Bancroft, at the Huntington, especially at the UCLA Special Collections, and various others. Looked at the various primary sources that I had, read broadly in the secondary literature, and started writing. The reality, though, was that once I passed exams, I also was running out of funding at UC Riverside. So I took a job teaching at Cal State Northridge, and I spent a year working there. Then I spent a year of heavily doing research and living off of Unemployment Insurance. Carlos Cortés got me a job teaching a class. Then I got the job at Stanford. Luckily, because of the support that I got at Stanford, primarily from Al Camarillo, but from the broader community, from my dean—they were very supportive of me finishing my dissertation.

The main work that needed to be done about my job at Stanford was during the school year, and they gave me the summers off to work at the Stanford Center for Chicano Research, which Al had just founded. I was given space and a room and the time off to finish. That's where I pretty much finished the dissertation; then left Stanford to take a job at UC Davis, where I taught for two quarters. Actually, I finished the dissertation there, and then took a job at Mount Holyoke. So that's the genesis of the dissertation. Again, its intent was to try to understand what was going on. What happened with the dissertation was that I got to the point where I had a dissertation; there wasn't much coherence to it, but I'd done a certain amount of research; I had the requisite amount of decent work that was there. Carlos and I declared it finished. I have

to give tremendous credit to Carlos Cortés as a wonderful mentor and a friend, who taught me how to be a scholar and taught me how to write and think. He used a thick blue felt pen and wrote very pungent comments about how badly I wrote. He taught me to avoid the passive voice, on fear of immortal pain. So I can't thank him enough. If you take a look at the acknowledgements in the book, you'll see how much Carlos meant to me. We talked earlier about Rudy Acuña sort of teaching me the role of what it is that we were supposed to do. Carlos taught me to be a scholar and taught me how to think about history in a very deep and meaningful way.

02-00:10:37

But the dissertation was incomplete. It was also half-baked and everything else a dissertation is. I knew that in particular, the first chapter or two on the nineteenth century weren't very good. So I set about developing more the twentieth century part of the story. Along the line, by this time, I'd gone to Mount Holyoke and taken the job at Indiana University Northwest. It was there, while at IUN, that I applied and was fortunate enough to win a Ford Foundation fellowship, which was crucial to everything else that I've become. That is the most important program for the development of black and Latino scholars, I think, that has existed. Rockefeller and other places have also done similar work, but not with the tremendous scope that the Ford Foundation fellowships have done. So that fellowship gave me the opportunity; gave me a year off from teaching, gave me a stipend. It allowed me to travel and do work, and it allowed me to go to Los Angeles, use my connections in that city.

In particular, working with Richard Alatorre, who had been teaching at UC Irvine while I was there. We became friends, acquaintances; we'd drink beer together on occasion. He by this time, was on the LA City Council. I was very persistent in trying to gain access to LAPD documents that were available. The department kept saying nothing existed. I persisted. There is something called the LA City Archives that's at the City Records Center. In talking to the staff there, they informed me that there were other police documents that were there; but I had no idea what they were, and they actually belong to the police, to the LAPD. They had control over them, and the people at the Records Center could do nothing with them unless they had the permission of the department. Working with Richard, and with people at the City Attorney's office, eventually we came to an agreement. I was fortunate that this was at the time when there had been a citizen initiative to take a look at the LAPD papers dealing with the assassination of Robert Kennedy. The City Attorney's office put out a statement saying that the people have the right to know the people's business on that case, and that under certain restrictions, citizens could look at these papers. So we came to agreement, first with the City Attorney, and then we wrote up an agreement that was approved by the Police Commission, and I got access to the papers. So that had been going on prior to gaining the Ford postdoc. Then I was able to use the Ford postdoc to park myself in LA for a number of months, and at the City Records Center, going through box upon box of LAPD records.

That meant that I could extend the book into the future. Now, the ambition was to do a book on police-Chicano relations from 1900 to about 1972, '73 or so. This was the eighties by this time. But the more I collected, the more it became apparent that I had so much stuff that I had a book, just going through Zoot Suit. Therefore, that became the genesis of that book.

Holmes: In that work, you highlight the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots. They kind of came together, feed into each other.

02-00:16:08

Escobar: Well, they were part of the same moral panic.

Holmes: Indeed. In this work, too, it's not just all that legwork—the important backstory of how you gained access to the police records—but you're also using a lot of statistics, a lot of other collections such as the Carey McWilliams' papers. And like we would see in many works within Chicano studies, it's interdisciplinary research. But to highlight that moral panic, as you were saying, that the Zoot Suit Riots were such a profound turning point in those relations. Could you talk a little bit about that?

02-00:16:59

Escobar: Well, it was a turning point in a variety of different ways; but it was something that had been building up over the century. As I say in my book, at the beginning of the century, neither the police department nor the Mexican immigrant community had much of a perception of each other. Or at least, if they had a perception, it was never really articulated in any of the documents. This is something that matured. Two things developed almost simultaneously. One, a distrust of the police department on the part of the Mexican immigrant, and later, Mexican American community. We weren't using the term Chicano then. I think I did in the book, but I think that's a misnomer now. I wouldn't do that again. But what you see is emerging distrust, because of the kinds of things that the LAPD was doing. From the beginning of the century through the 1930s, trying to repress Mexican and Mexican American labor union activity. That was crucial. During the early part of the century, trying to suppress revolutionary activity. There was also instances of police misconduct that created hostility on the part of the community. They became *causes célèbres* from time to time. There would be separate incidents. There wasn't a coherent strategy or a coherent notion of them yet.

At the same time that that was going, the police were beginning to professionalize, trying to create an understanding, a theory of why they existed and what to do about it. They were there to fight crime, but what did that mean? Well, that they needed to understand crime. Given what was going on in those years in the national psyche, they began to link together race and criminality. You take a look at the criminological literature at the time, especially in the twenties and early thirties. There was a linkage in the early part of the century, sort of literally a racial-physiological linkage, between

people of a certain race and criminal activity. Then later on, when the Chicago School came to the fore, more of a sociological explanation. But they still had the same emphasis. So the police started to look and think about crime as somehow being linked to race. I mentioned before we started, that there was a moment when all this came to me. You mentioned that I used statistics. Well, basically, one of the things that anybody has access to—they're public documents—were the LAPD annual reports, starting in the 1920s, up until about 1950. They were thick, long, hundred-or-so page long reports on a variety of areas. But they just listed statistics in a variety of ways. One of the ways that they listed all arrests made by the LAPD were by race and gender and a number of other ways. I spent a good amount of time creating all these tables, looking at them and I kept trying to think of what they meant. What were they actually telling me?

02-00:21:30

We didn't have good information on the population, good population statistics, in the 1920s and '30s. Thirties, a little bit better; forties, no so much. It's just the way Mexicans were counted in the census. I was trying to figure out what arrests for violent, class one felonies meant; what changing number of arrests for juveniles meant, by race in every case. They [were] also split between adults and race and juveniles. I remember sitting there thinking hard about it. We lived, at the time, in a house that overlooked Lake Michigan, and it was cold. There were literally little icebergs bobbing up and down on the lake. It occurred to me that the statistics themselves gave me very few answers. It's the fact that they existed, that they were looking at race. They were looking at crime and race together. It should've been apparent from the get-go, but I was dense and it took me a while to get to that moment. But it occurred to me that that's the key; that what was going on was that they were looking for ways to make themselves, the police, look better, or understand what they were doing and fight crime. And one of the ways that they did it, was to try to understand why crime is committed, who within the population commits crime, and they started linking it to race.

The problem was that they had statistics that showed that Mexicans seemingly were arrested in a larger proportion than their actual numbers within the population. This led police to believe that Mexican Americans were more crime-prone. What they equated was an arrest for crime, with a crime actually being committed, which of course, is false. So what we end up with by the time we get to World War II and the moral panic around zoot suiters, is a community that is suspicious and somewhat uncomfortable with police; a community that had been trying, through labor unions and other activities, to move beyond discrimination and into the middle class people. Among youth, they had become, to a certain extent, alienated by the ceiling that limited what they could do.

In the book, I talk a lot about the attitudes, say, of teachers and school officials about how far Mexicans could go. They're being taught about the American



dream, but on the other hand, they're being purposefully under-educated. Some of these people became alienated and angry and withdrew from society. To a certain extent, it was just what we would today understand as normal adolescent rebellion. But we didn't understand it that way. Developmental psychology had not been as developed, it hadn't developed that understanding yet. So what developed was an attitude on the part of police that the zoot suiters who walked around with an attitude were openly hostile to police, somewhat hostile to authority across the way, were seen as a danger to society. And you saw growing antagonism develop. The book tells various incidents about this growing antagonism, that eventually blew up with the Sleepy Lagoon case. There was a death that occurred. We don't know whether it was a murder or not; it was hard to tell what exactly happened to the young man. He was probably killed, but they never knew.

02-00:27:06

But then you see a citizenry that is aroused and that rose to their defense. Part of this are people in the Communist party that had gone through the experience of Scottsboro and saw what happened there. Now we had the Sleepy Lagoon boys, instead of the Scottsboro boys, but a lot of the same kinds of tactics. But you also had an energized group of Mexican Americans that had been involved in labor union activities, that had antecedents going all the way back to the anarchist Magón brothers. So what you see is one group, the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee, emerging to bring justice for them. In the meantime, the papers—in particular, the LA press—is continuing to print sensational stories, the community as a whole develops this moral panic, and then you have the Zoot Suit Riots. We mentioned last time about Watts and how resources flowed into the community after Watts. The same thing happened after Zoot Suit. But you also got out of that an energized community, the veterans coming back, people like Ed Roybal in particular, who come back and begin to agitate for more rights. So yeah, it is a turning point. Police-community relations, the trauma of the trial, and Zoot Suit, along with just a maturation of the community that had gone through the Depression, and now the war, and then coming back demanding their rights as citizens—all of that came together and police continued to be an issue within the community. But at the same time, police came to see Mexican Americans, especially Mexican American youth, as a criminal element.

Holmes:

Before we move on, I found this work as another great example of what, in the field of Chicano studies, the value of interdisciplinary research. Because if you look at just what the LAPD has in their papers, as a historian, you read the *LA Times*—. If you didn't do the statistical, the kind of quantitative analysis that you did to actually show that reported crime is actually going down during this period, that you have the hysteria, right—. You're able to really, I think, juxtapose both sides of that story, and then let the reader come to their own conclusions, to see how this hysteria is actually getting built.

02-00:30:52

Escobar:

Yeah. My sense about how I write is, I try not to write angry; but if people get angry from reading what I write, that's better. If they reach it on their own. In a sense, that's also the way I approach teaching. But that's what I do. Clearly, my work—that work and actually, a good deal of my work—is more centered in social science ideas: criminology, sociology, political science, and those areas; more than in cultural studies. That's clear for me. That put me a little bit on the fringe for some folks. By the time the book came out, culture studies was in the fore. Postmodernism was very influential, and I'm sort of taking a different approach. I don't know what I was doing recently, but I came across reviews of that book that I had never seen before. They were in sociology, criminology, and social science journals. The book did receive broad acclaim. It was very well regarded. It is still in print. UC Press is still making money from it, and I get a few dollars every once in a while from it. So that means it's continued to hold. But my point is, is that yeah, you're right; my approach has always been broad. I'm using Dick Hebdige's work on subcultures, which is pure culture studies stuff, to try to understand who the zoot suiters were and how that all developed. Great stuff, if you're interested in that. At the same time that I'm reading the political scientists and scholars like Gary Marx.

Holmes:

Well, it certainly had legs. Speaking of which, then it also gave you a leg up to developing your academic career, which you touched on a little bit and I wanted to talk a little bit more about. You held a number of academic appointments throughout graduate school, as you were mentioning, as well as after. And this really gives us, again, a great vantage point that I'd like you to talk about, of the development of Chicano studies at different universities.

02-00:33:56

Escobar:

We talked a little bit about the different places where I worked. Where I really got a good vantage point of how Chicano studies was evolving was during my years at Stanford.

Holmes:

Okay.

02-00:34:11

Escobar:

Because during my years at Stanford, my job included recruiting, encouraging students from other schools—Chicano undergraduates, as well as black and others—to apply to Stanford. Again, because I was working in graduate studies, primarily in the PhD programs, but to a certain extent, also the professional school.

Holmes:

To clarify, you were an assistant dean.

02-00:34:42

Escobar:

Assistant dean of graduate studies.

Holmes:

Studies and research.

02-00:34:47

Escobar:

Yeah, okay. Yeah, that's right, studies and research. I kept forgetting that part. But the focus was on recruiting students. So what we did, there were actually sort of a group of people from different campuses—UC campuses and a few other places—who would travel together to these graduate school fairs, which meant that I would visit campuses all over the Southwest, and to a certain extent, the Midwest and even Northeast. Now, we understood—I understood at least—that the best way to link some Southwestern school and Stanford was through their own faculty members there. I did two things. First, I went to NACCS conferences, National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies. I went to those conferences, where I interacted with a whole bunch of different people. We talked about that earlier. We talked about that edited volume, in which I had a small role, and the luminaries that I was with.

But at the same time, I would go to the campuses. I would go to the University of Arizona, I would go to ASU, I would go to New Mexico State and to University of New Mexico. I'd go to all these places and sit down. The natural place to start was with their Chicano studies department. So I was able to go in and talk to these people, get a sense of what was going on there. That wasn't my purpose; that was sort of secondary. The purpose was for them to connect me with other faculty who might have students that they could send into math, they could send into engineering, whatever the case may be. But I would start there. Because of my own graduate school, because of my own academic interests and a little bit of name recognition, I got entrée. So I was able to go to all these places and get a sense of what was going on there. I saw some of what worked. Again, I wasn't doing it with the intention of ever developing my own program; that was well off into the future. But I did get a sense of what worked, what didn't work, what pitfalls places could have, because I heard all of this stuff. A lot of people I interacted with told me about it.

Holmes:

We don't need to air dirty laundry or call certain institutions out, I guess; but could you give us some examples of what your observations were of some successes, and then some of the pitfalls that some universities were struggling with?

02-00:38:02

Escobar:

Well, there are a number of things that come to mind. Somewhere in your outline, you mention ethnic studies versus straight Chicano studies. Well, one of the things that happened, especially at places like the California State system, were that I got the sense that central administrations were never really that interested in developing these in a lot of places. So they were under-resourced, unless you had *really* strong leadership. And by strong leadership, I mean a coherent group of people who were not going to let them get away with this—here I'm thinking of Northridge as a prime example. Some places, they were under-resourced. They were established in ways that were doomed to failure. If they were separate units of some kind or another, they were

always sort of the stepchild to the university. In places where they worked and I'm thinking at the time, there was Northridge, but there was also—the town north of Bakersfield?—Fresno. Cal State Fresno, which also had a good, coherent group. They work well. But to the extent that they didn't work, it oftentimes evolved because the places were under-resourced. They didn't have the resources. They didn't have the people. Many times, they would hire people with MAs or people who were at best, ABDs—especially at the CSUCs—being asked to teach three, four classes a semester, and were never able to finish their dissertation and would spin out and burn [out]. So getting the right number of resources was important.

I don't know that it mattered so much, being in an ethnic studies probably, as opposed to being in a straight Chicano studies program. Sometimes it worked in some places, and sometimes it didn't in others. Somewhere down the line, you asked me which is better. I think it really depends on the local context. So ethnic studies, I think, has worked fairly well at San Francisco State. At other places, it hasn't. So I'll only mention the places where things work well. Having a separate department, a separate unit, worked well at Northridge. In other places where they didn't get the kinds of resources that they needed, it hasn't. One of the things that lacking resources meant was that it creates infighting. Some of it may be ideological. A lot of it is ideological; a lot of it was ego-driven. I don't know what you do about that, except try to create an organizational culture where those things don't get in the way. Eventually, they sort of do; but if you do it right, it doesn't get totally out of hand. But to a great extent, it's being under-resourced that creates the problem.

I went to a number of schools where they didn't have any organized unit. There were people in individual depts who were struggling. They were stigmatized as being affirmative action hires or something like that, and again, they did not have the kind of support that they needed. But in other places, they thrived. So when I arrived at Stanford, there was no Chicano studies department. Al and a few others were able to put together the SCCR, Stanford Center for Chicano Research. That helped some, but there was not a unit there. Somewhere you asked me about Stanford. Stanford had a commitment—and obviously, I was there doing this—to enhance the number of students, to diversify its student body. But in the years that I was there—and for a long time afterwards—they really had a lousy record of diversifying their faculty. In terms of diversifying the curriculum, even worse. So what we had at Stanford in liberal arts and sciences—I forget what they called it now—were really, just a handful of people. Al Camarillo, Renato Rosaldo, Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, Arturo Islas, I think were the only ones that there. We had a couple of other people. We had one person in engineering and one person in the business school, who counted themselves as Chicanos. And I might be forgetting someone. And they did well. Al and Arturo and Renato, until his wife died, did well. And Tomás, as well. But it was hard for them, because they were isolated. But nevertheless, obviously, good things happened there while Al was there. I understand that he has not been replaced with another

person focusing on Chicanos, and I think that says a lot about Stanford. I do talk dirty about some places.

Holmes: Well, we're here at Cal, so yeah, I think that's okay. [laughs]

02-00:44:59

Escobar: Yeah, right, So it's quite alright, huh? [laughs] So importance of resource, structure, names—. You could never call a place Chicano studies in South Texas, but you'd get away with Mexican American studies. And Mexican American studies at U of A. Again, the names matter, because it has a lot to do with the context of the place that they're serving. So we're not at my time at ASU yet, but maybe we can talk more about that when we get there.

Holmes: Absolutely. So you spent four years at Stanford?

02-00:45:57

Escobar: Four to five, yeah.

Holmes: Again, such a learning experience about how the field is developing, what works and not, as we'll come to here in a bit, very important knowledge for you in setting up your own program.

02-00:47:12

Escobar: Right.

Holmes: Then after Stanford, you finish your dissertation shortly, at UC Davis; and then you and Gayle, Gayle Gullett, your wife, I think are married at this time.

02-00:47:29

Escobar: Yeah, we were married in 1975. So even before we got to Stanford. Going through comps together and qualifying exams together, we would look at each other and think, what if one of us fails? What if one of us doesn't make it? Look, we were both fine.

Holmes: Then both of you travel back East for a visiting professorship at Mount Holyoke.

02-00:48:11

Escobar: Yeah.

Holmes: Talk a little bit about that experience. Here you were evaluating, in a sense, ethnic studies/Mexican American studies, Chicano studies, these kind of programs, as part of your job at Stanford; but also reaching out to these other universities. Then you're moving completely to the other coast.

02-00:48:34

Escobar: That evolved out of the relationship between Carlos Cortés and Johnny Faragher [John Mack Faragher]. Johnny was going on a sabbatical leave, and they knew each other. Carlos mentioned my name. He knew I was at Davis,

looking for another gig. I was almost finishing up. Had a phone interview and I went out there. It was great experience for me. I loved teaching there. It was wonderful. It was a wonderful experience. I had a wonderful group of colleagues—Danny [Daniel] Czitrom. I don't remember all of their names. We had a lot of fun. The students were amazingly good

Holmes: Mount Holyoke is all-woman's school.

02-00:50:10

Escobar: All women's school, yeah. They needed someone to do colonial. So I taught the colonial survey. I taught a class on historical methodology, which students had to read primary documents, and you picked a theme. Again, because they wanted somebody in that early era, on the revolution and constitution, so we did that. Daniel Shays hung out at the stables at Mount Holyoke during Shays Rebellion, so it was pretty cool. I taught a course on comparative colonialism, looking at Latin America and the United States, which was a blast to teach. The Chicano studies, the Chicano history that I taught—.

Holmes: Which was the first Chicano history class offered, I think.

02-00:51:24

Escobar: And it was a senior seminar, with a paper at the end. So I taught those courses. The students were wonderful. I taught before at Northridge, I taught before at UCs, at Riverside and at Davis. One of the things that was going on at Mount Holyoke, I heard, was that the seniors taking the research seminar were hanging out and helping the first-year students who were taking the survey. We did fun things. I ran a film series. At Mount Holyoke, there was a dorm that Latinas—I don't think it was prescribed that people had to go there—it was the minority, and lesbian dorm, which I thought was pretty funny. But you had a good group of kids, and they were engaged and fun to teach. So it was fun.

You mentioned my wife, Gayle. It was hard on her. She was pregnant that year with our daughter Cristina, who was born in Springfield, Massachusetts. She managed to get a job. She had some kind of appointment with the Five College Consortium; but she managed to get a job teaching at Eastern Connecticut State College. I forget the name of the little town [Willimantic]. I think I went and actually gave her final exam; the baby was due at the end of April—I would drive with her. We'd get a babysitter to take care of our three-year-old, and I would drive with her for those last two sessions, because she was so pregnant at the time. So it was harder on her; but for me, it was a great opportunity to hang out with really good colleagues and make friends and again, sort of continue to develop my teaching chops. It was a lot of fun, and I learned a lot there about teaching. I had learned a lot at Davis the previous year. Joe Trotter was the next-door office from one I had. Again, that was a sabbatical replacement for Luis Arroyo. Joe Trotter would see me there working away, trying to finish the dissertation and developing lectures at the

same time. He came in one day and patted me on the back and he said, "You're working too damn hard. Look, save yourself. You're just going to burn out and you won't be able to do what you've done. Show movies—" I forget what he told me to do but, just chill out and don't try to be the perfect teacher. Just try to get through. This is your first real time. I was teaching history of Mexico, which was my second field. So all of those things were fun and hard. But I did learn a lot about teaching and about collegiality. More at Mount Holyoke than at Davis. People were very nice to me at Davis, too, but I was only there for two quarters, whereas Mount Holyoke they pride themselves as being a little family and stuff. So liberal arts colleges—this had such an impression on me that we went into considerable debt to send both of our kids to liberal arts colleges.

Holmes: Yes, it is. And we don't have many of them in the West, versus when one spends time back East—

02-00:56:18

Escobar: Yeah, a few, yeah.

Holmes: There's many out there in the East. It was interesting, too, to think about—you're at Mount Holyoke and the diversity that you could already see taking place in a New England liberal arts college, of having Latinas attending. Again, this is a New England liberal arts college. What was the number of Latinas then that could be there?

02-00:56:48

Escobar: Oh, gosh, I don't know. I taught the seminar; it had about fifteen or so people, and I had Puerto Rican Americans, people from New York, people from New England, people from Colorado. I don't remember anybody from LA or from the far West Coast, but there must've been black and brown kids. Then some of those kids took other classes from me in the second semester. I think some of them ended up in the comparative colonialism class. So we did stuff. We did the film series because they wanted more. We had a symposium at the end of the year, in which Rudy Torres, who's now at Irvine and a dear old friend of mine. But he was teaching at Hampshire [College] at the time. He's a strict LA guy. He said he missed the smog of LA, being in Western Massachusetts. He and I were very good friends. He and his wife were there. We were feeling pretty isolated, and he was the only person at Hampshire. Ellen McCracken, Mario's [Mario T. Garica's] wife, was teaching at UMass at the time, but Mario had a grant, so he was spending a lot of his time there. NACCS is set up into *focos*, little cells. We developed our own little cell that the three of us would get together; we'd read together, we'd share ideas. We ended up putting on a symposium that was funded by at least three of the schools. Ellen got us some money from UMass and Rudy got some money from Hampshire and I got some money from Mount Holyoke, and we were able to have a little symposium. We brought out Mario Barrera, we brought out Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, for a one-day symposium on Chicano studies that was a blast. We

had a dance at the end; the students came. We had a wonderful time. So we did fun things and like I said, it was a wonderful experience. You said, as we were walking up, that you hated leaving New England after six years. Well, I hated leaving New England after the one. It was only a one-year gig. I was able to work out, at the end of that, could've spent another year in sort of a joint appointment between Mount Holyoke and Smith. But I had a daughter, and I got a tenure-track job, and so I went to that.

Holmes: Well, let's talk about that. You were hired in 1984, and you joined the Department of Minority Studies at Indiana University Northwest.

02-01:00:16

Escobar: Right.

Holmes: Discuss your experience a little bit here. Going to New England is one thing. Then you're almost following the maturation of the field itself and setting up roots in the Midwest.

02-01:00:34

Escobar: Zaragosa Vargas and I both applied, competed with each other, for two jobs at that time. He beat me out at Yale, and I beat him out at IUN. I don't regret going to IUN. We had, again, great colleagues, good support from the administration, a wonderful community of like-minded scholars, very activist-oriented—at least the people I hung out with. A very activist-oriented place. It's a place where a lot of radicals from here such as Jack Greenberg, as well as other Berkeley refugees were there. A good friend that I'm going to have dinner with on Saturday here in Berkeley was there, a guy by the name of Ron Cohen, who comes from here, a historian. My own department, I was it. I was Chicano studies; I was Latino studies at IUN.

One of the things that IUN forced me to do—and to a certain extent, this began to happen at Mount Holyoke—I had to deal with a more diverse student population than just the Mexican Americans that were here or at Stanford. There was diversity there, but I wasn't dealing with curriculum there. And certainly, more than Chicano studies at Northridge. But when I went to Indiana, to IUN, I had to deal with a student population and community that was about two-thirds of Mexican descent, and about one-third Puerto Ricans. I had to combine the two. In fact, the program that I dealt with, they wanted to change the name to Hispanic studies, which I refused to do. It had a clumsy name, but it's okay. It was Chicano-Riqueño studies. So that forced me to think in a more interdisciplinary way, in terms of my pedagogy. It was hardest in history, because there isn't a Latino history. Some will probably disagree with me, and others will. But it's hard to integrate. There are histories and there are different paths to where you go. There are some similarities, but they're not all the same, any more than Mexican Americans and African Americans have the same histories. You can do things together, and God knows I have, especially in that unit. So it forced me to think about Latinos



and it forced me, as a teacher, to pull in more sources, more interdisciplinary stuff.

The downside of being there—well, there were two downsides. First, I was alone. I was the only Chicano with a PhD in the county. For the kind of support, other intellectual support, I had to go into Chicago. There were places like, particularly, Loyola of Chicago—Louise Kerr was there—and there were a few people at UIC. University of Illinois Chicago was just developing at the time. It was just taking off. And at DePaul. So it was lonely, in terms of who to sit and talk to about what I was doing, and who understood the work that I was doing, and was able to support it, who was able to mentor me as a young assistant professor who didn't know what the heck he was doing, on how to develop. But we found ways. I'll talk about that in a second.

02-01:05:35

The other part, that I was never able to solve, was these miniscule enrollments in my Chicano and Riqueño classes. Single digits for most of the time in those classes. I would teach three classes a semester; sometimes two sections of the US history survey, and one in Chicano studies or Chicano-Riqueño studies. So the classes were small. Even though we worked with the student groups, even though we did various other things, it was really hard to get much in the way of student enrollment in the classes.

Holmes:

That seems to be a big difference from what you just experienced in the Northeast at Mount Holyoke.

02-01:06:27

Escobar:

Yeah. But again, the classes are small there, too, but they were purposely small. Let me put it this way: one of the first classes I taught at ASU, after I left IUN, I had more students in some of my classes at ASU than I had in all the time that I was at IUN—not counting the US history surveys, because they always filled. But then again, I developed my chops as a teacher there. I was there for nine years. Won the Ford postdoc there. Again, the confusion as to my career, as to how it developed, led to that first article in *JAH* [*Journal of American History*]. While my appointment was in so-called minority studies, there were only three of us in that department. There was another assistant professor and then a senior person. But those other two people did African American studies—one was in literature, and the other person was in urban studies, in urban planning. These, again, were people that were super supportive, but they could only do so much. So at one point, I was told, "Well, you've got to write articles. A book won't be important." So Jim [James] Lane, who was a colleague in history—again, a dear friend—and I had done the *Forging a Community*, the anthology on Northwest Indiana. So they said, "Now, just get out a couple of articles, and that'll get you tenure." So I wrote up the dialectics piece. On a lark, I sent it off to the *JAH*, and I was surprised as hell that they published it. But that's another story. So the book was sort of set aside for a while. I kept working on it. By this time, I had collected all this

data. I was continuing to write, but I went off and wrote this article. Writing an article for the *JAH* is a year's project.

Holmes: Yeah.

02-01:09:36

Escobar: So there was that. On the other hand, this is the place where I really spent my most time. Because of the lack of interaction on campus, I had to find my sense of accomplishment someplace else. That meant a lot of community involvement. I dealt with the isolation, intellectual isolation, by working with a number of other people to develop the Midwest Consortium for Chicano Research, I think it was called. We got money. We had people from Michigan to Nebraska to Minnesota and Wisconsin; Ohio State was there, we had people from Iowa. So again, I began interacting with all of these people at the different institutions. And all of them were, like myself, by themselves. So, you're isolated, but then you find ways of building a community.

Holmes: Now, did you meet these colleagues through NACCS?

02-01:11:19

Escobar: Some of them, I knew through NACCS. Miguel Contreras, at Nebraska, I knew through NACCS. A person by the name of Teresa Cordoba, who was at UIC, was a NACCS person. A number of people I knew through NACCS, and those networks help. But we're, geographically, very separated. But then on the other hand, there were other people, like Felix Padilla. He did work on Puerto Ricans, who was not a NACCS person, but we became close during the years that we were together there.

Holmes: For younger students reading this transcript, networking across state lines, creating a community over this Midwestern geographic space, to pull it together, to coordinate meetings, the thing that needs to be underscored here is that there's no internet, there's no email.

02-01:12:38

Escobar: Right.

Holmes: So this is, we're picking up the phone and not texting, but we're actually making a phone call.

02-01:12:44

Escobar: Yes.

Holmes: Or writing letters, and/or both.

02-01:12:50

Escobar: Or driving.

Holmes: Yes, yes. So just to say that there's another level of commitment in coordinating this and putting together this community, rather than sending off some emails and we'll set up a time.

02-01:13:04

Escobar: Well, it's survival, to a certain extent, that you're dealing with because we're all feeling the sense of isolation. We're all dealing with the same kinds of issues. To the extent that we were doing Chicano and Latino research, it the Midwest Consortium for Latino Research—MCLR is what it was. To the extent that we were doing that, we were often the only persons, or among a handful of people at our institutions, depending on how big it was. IUN was a small, little 5,000-student campus. If you're at some of the bigger places, you might've had other colleagues. If you're in Chicago, you had a better chance; but if you were way out in Ohio or Nebraska, it would be harder. Now there're all kinds of wonderful people at those places; but at the time, we were pretty much isolated.

Also, while I was there, we established the Latino Historical Society of Northwest Indiana, working only with community groups. There is something called the Calumet Regional Archives. So they were working hard on campus, because of historians like Jim Lane and my friend Ron Cohen, were working hard at developing an archive, and they had an archivist in the library, who was committed to collecting the histories, oral histories and papers, of *the region*, as it was called. So again, it was my way of reaching out to community. This was a group made up of LULACers, former members of the League of United Latin American Citizens, mostly steelworkers. This was steel country. A lot of steelworkers, a few teachers, a lawyer here and there would show up. We'd have monthly meetings, in which people would talk about their experiences. The whole idea was to get them to contribute their papers to the archives, and we were pretty successful. It lasted for a few years after I left. That was, again, a way of me feeling useful and purposeful. It was in many ways, a good place. But there was no doubt, when I got the offer at ASU, that I was going to take it. One of the things IUN did eventually, they also came to recognize the skills of Gayle, my wife. She helped develop a small program in women's studies, and she ended up with a tenure-track job there that she created for herself out of just making herself necessary for the school. As I said, we developed lasting friendships with people there.

Holmes: Well, before we move on to ASU, I think this would be a good point to talk a little bit about something you and I discussed off camera, and that's balance in the academy. A lot of academics struggle with learning to balance family and the academy, right? Having that balance. Of course, we know so many of our friends who have struggled with that, some successfully, some unsuccessfully. Maybe say a few words on that, because while you're feeling isolated and you're building these networks in Indiana, you're also raising a family.

02-01:17:29

Escobar:

Right. I think actually, it almost becomes more of an issue when we get to ASU, when my kids are a little bit older. Yeah, there is always this question of balance. Now, when the children are small, you can control things a little bit better than you can when they get older. When they're small, it's easier. With both Gayle and I teaching at IUN: Gayle started with one class or two, then sort of became half-time, and then sort of became full-time not tenure-track, and then became tenure track. But the place was accommodating to us. Sufficiently accommodating that we could teach on opposite days, so that there was always a backup. Emergencies happen with kids. Kids get sick, they can't go to school or they can't go—. Somebody has to stay home with them. So there was always a backup. So that was a little bit easier, at that point.

When I got to ASU, with the responsibility of creating a new department, it became harder. Because I knew myself well enough, let me just put it that way, I went to a time management seminar, to be able to better manage my time. I was going to be an administrator and I had to know how to do that better than I had in the past, when all I had to do was worry about myself and my family. One of the things that this time management program did is, they make you start out and first of all, declare your values. What are the things that you want to do? What is the most important thing that you have to do, and prioritize the things that you need to do to accomplish that goal. Well, I had two at ASU. One, developing this program, developing more access, developing my own career, knowledge, and all that. In other words, the academic side. But equally important for me was my family. So I had to think a lot about the balance between the two of those things. It was hard. The main thing that suffered, as opposed to our colleagues, is that—there's a price you pay. And the price I paid is that I wasn't able to pay as much attention to the academic part of the job, and especially the scholarship, as I would if things were slower. Stuff came out slower, but it eventually came out, it eventually happened. But I wasn't able to put the same kind of focus as other people, sometimes at the expense of their families. Sometimes it didn't work. You've probably seen it; I know I've seen it. My situation was, I had a two-career family. But some of my more productive friends have two-person career. Gayle and I had very strict agreements as to how things would work in the house and how we shared equally in all those things. So I read half the stories, changed half the diapers. But we also helped each other. Everything wasn't so strict that we didn't help each other out in a crisis.

02-01:22:21

The funniest one was when Gayle went off to an OAH conference and left me with two kids with chicken pox. I like to tell that story. Women now say to me, "And we're supposed to think that's great, Ed?" Which they say lovingly, so it's okay. But that's important. I think that was every bit as important in my life equally. And I'm equally proud of my kids, so I'll brag for a second here. My son, Marcos, who lives a few miles up the street here, in Eastmont part of Oakland, runs the training, and I think part of the recruitment effort, for

HERE, the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees union. He went to Grinnell College in Iowa. After finishing an anthropology degree—didn't become a historian; I'm sad about that, but it didn't get me anywhere—he wanted to do something in community organizing. He remembered the stories we would tell and my mother would tell about her years so he got a job working with HERE straight of college, and he's been with them ever since. Our daughter Cristina, she's going to be doing freelance work now, but up until two weeks ago, she was the communications director for the Representation Project. I don't know if you know what that is.

Holmes: Well, why don't you explain it for the audience.

02-01:24:14

Escobar: It's Jennifer Siebel Newsom's—. Have you heard of the movie *Miss Representation*? Yes. That's Jennifer Siebel Newsom, who is Gavin Newsom's wife. The Representation Project was her nonprofit that addressed how gender is portrayed in the media. Cristina was the communications director for that up until a couple of weeks ago, when she decided to move on and get involved with other projects, including Nayeli, her twenty-two-month-old baby. So they went on to do really great things. Before that, Cristina was working with a nonprofit that dealt with teenage dating violence. So they're both involved in social justice issues, and to a great extent, I attribute that to the attention we paid. So it was important.

Holmes: Well, I'd like to get your thoughts on the development of the field.

02-01:25:30

Escobar: Okay.

Holmes: Usually the work of the first generation, which you're part of—.

02-01:25:37

Escobar: No, I think of myself in the second generation. If you think of it in terms of pioneers, there was Galarza, there was Sanchez and McWilliams and those people. Then along came Rudy. I'm not the same generation as Rudy—

Holmes: No. But, there's not many that are, though, either, right? That we could still interview.

02-01:26:18

Escobar: Well, I know, yeah. Mario Barrera or Mario García or people—. It's not a matter of caliber; it's just a matter of chronology, more than anything else. So I wouldn't put myself there, except maybe to the extent of what I did at ASU. But that didn't happen until the nineties.

Holmes: But also, your time at Stanford too. So I always thought of you right on the edge; broadening the fold then of the first generation. Well, we'll put it that way.

02-01:26:54

Escobar: Okay.

Holmes: But if we look at the early work of the field itself, I wanted to get your opinion on what works really inspired you and really struck you?

02-01:27:27

Escobar: Well, I'm trying to think. Let me see if I can restructure it, going back and thinking of where the field was. During the eighties, when I really started teaching, and therefore, addressing it and developing curriculum, among the things that I did at IU Northwest was restructure the curriculum. But to a certain extent, that was almost bogus, because I *was* the curriculum. There was only one other person—two other people. There was one person in Spanish, who taught some Latino literature, and then there was a person in bilingual ed, and that was it. All we had was a minor, so it was hard to do. So I didn't have to think that hard about it. But to the extent that I was teaching intro classes and things like that. I was sort of still trying to develop paradigms, still trying to understand how to bring cohesion into the field. We're looking for some kind of a theoretical way of looking at it. We started out with internal colonialism, various forms of Marxism, to a certain extent; there's still cultural nationalism that is a way of looking at it; and then more traditional, standard forms of epistemology, of how to even know what it is that we know. So these things continue. I think we're still searching for those kinds of things.

In the later eighties and early nineties, you see the rise of cultural studies and postmodernism as other approaches. So to a certain extent, you see these things occurring. Frankly, it's good, the lack of coherence. That might've actually been a mistake, to look for some coherent theory that brings everything together. The lack of coherence means we're still—we might be thrashing about, but we're talking, we're engaging, and we're producing new knowledge and thinking of new ways of creating new knowledge. We're thinking about issues leading in a variety of fields, in a different ways.

The deficiencies in the field, I think, in the eighties, came from the lack of development in the humanities, and particularly in the arts. By humanities, I am for the moment excluding history because it can go either way. NACCS started out with a social science name to it. I knew people who thought that NACCS went wayward when they started including more people doing literature; should've kept nose to the grindstone for the activist kinds of things. What good is studying literature? How do you bring about social change through literature? Of course, I disagreed with that. When I would show students music or film or art or other things along those lines, that they could claim as part of their heritage, as part of how people were engaging in social justice issues, then that was very meaningful to the students, even back in Indiana. So I think that part of it is just beginning to develop. Then my own sense is that what really began to change things is the work of Gloria

Anzaldúa, who not only paid more attention to these issues of the arts and the humanities. And she wasn't alone, but she sort of brought it to sort of a form of fruition, putting gender at the center of what it is that we were doing. I think there again, if you want to think about it in this particular way, it's sort of crude, but I'll go with it anyway. There had been a focus before, on race and class. Not just because of her; a variety of people. But I think Anzaldúa is crucial here, as finding a way out. But also including gender as, say, one of the pillars of Chicana and Chicano studies that needed to be addressed, I think that that was one of the main steps forward that occurred in the eighties and early nineties.

Holmes: When thinking of some of the earliest, that first group of scholarship and work early on in the field, we get certain kind of themes. Then again, what you were just saying really kind of leads us to our next discussion of how it evolved. The field began to make those changes, like including gender, analyzing gender, particularly within a culture that was—at least from an outsider's view—very patriarchal in many senses, if we look at the Chicano community. Or at least how it's discussed.

02-01:35:35

Escobar: It's perceived that way. White communities are also very patriarchal. In fact, Gayle grew up in a more patriarchal family than I did.

Holmes: Yeah, that's why I'm saying from an outsider's view of how it's perceived. I had many friends growing up that in regard to those discussions, I would say, "That's not how their house operated."

02-01:36:14

Escobar: No, right. Well, I had a very strong father, too, but a very strong mother.

Holmes: Well, which is a credence to how the field began to change, of recognizing the strength of women and the complexities of the communities. As did the larger fold of US history, as well, right around the same time.

02-01:36:40

Escobar: Well, within history, clearly—I was thinking more broadly within the interdisciplinary field; that's where Anzaldúa has the greatest impact.

Holmes: Absolutely.

02-01:36:50

Escobar: Within history, we have a number of people that are doing that. No one more than Vicki [Ruiz], and Antonia [Castañeda] and Deena González. But more broadly, people like Cordelia Candelaria, who was at Colorado and then at ASU, in literature, and Tey Diana Rebolledo at UNM, who put out big anthologies on Chicana literature that are really crucial to teach, if you're teaching interdisciplinary, say, intro courses, where you can use literature. The intro course that I taught back in Indiana, and then really developed

differently at ASU, was a course that developed kind of precedent for the IU system that had the ambition of creating a requirement for everybody in the system to take at least one course in ethnic studies. I was part of the taskforce that was to develop that course. The course that developed was a little bit like the methods course that I taught at Mount Holyoke. Essentially, you give students primary and secondary documents touching on a variety of fields, and discuss them and let them reach their own conclusions. Taught right, they'll reach the conclusions that make sense. When I got to ASU—and even before at Indiana—but when I got to ASU, the way I decided to teach that course was by trying to highlight the strengths of my unit. Because the idea, if you're teaching an intro to Chicano studies, the idea is you want them to take more classes. So you develop a number of fields that deal with this. I try to deal with the course somewhat chronologically. I started with history, but then would have a week dedicated to looking at migration and immigration, a week dealing with labor. In some of those, you had to find the resources to teach that. Those began to develop over a period of time. Eventually, you got to the arts and humanities. So I think that was crucial to understanding the whole human experience of Chicanos and Latinos in the United States. You had to look at it from a variety of perspectives. That's the thing that developed slowly in the eighties, but then began to develop more broadly through the decade. Again, Vicki's book, Antonia's work, Deena's work, a variety of other people's work, who bring gender into the fore, as well as outside of history, people in literature and the arts.

Holmes: In looking in other areas of where we see the field also maturing, from the eighties into the nineties—again, many of these themes, your dissertation and book hit on. A lot of the earlier work is really focused on California and/or Texas. While we look at labor, particularly farm labor—the kind of inspirations that we get from Carey McWilliams' work—to where now we began to expand of looking into the Midwest—

02-01:41:56

Escobar: Yes. Dennis Valdez was doing this, Zaragosa was doing this. Louise Kerr, I don't know that she ever published her own work. Obviously, others start doing those community studies that you talked about. But there really was a fair amount of work also on New Mexico. More in the colonial period, more in the run-up to that. Obviously, Ramón's work was also from this earlier period, Ramón Gutiérrez. So New Mexico had some, but yeah. One thought you sparked earlier and I had written in notes, is that even during those times, we were paying a lot of attention on structures of repression, if you want to call them that. I'm dealing with police, so who am I to complain about that? But I think what was equally important, again, from a pedagogical perspective, is looking at agency, looking at the structures within the Chicano community that are sources of strength. We're not looking at those. Those are not there in the early eighties, but begin to develop. That's where literature and the arts are important in showing—. Agency is a tad overused, but nevertheless, it's a way of thinking about the strengths that exist in the



communities, that they draw from for their own to deal with daily lives. What is the term? It's an anthropological term that is not coming to my brain at the moment. But essentially, it means strengths that people use to create their daily lives. I think it's important to look at that in terms of political organizing, but also in just day-to-day life. One of the things that Carlos [Vélez-Ibáñez] did in his main book from 1997 that I've used increasingly—. But again, names are escaping me at the moment. There's a section in the book where he talks about how family life, the family unit, the household unit, is where the strength lies to deal with the repressive structures that can bind. But others before that were doing this. That's what was missing. And I think it's giving more substance to the field as a whole. You know what, Todd? I'm getting tired. We've been at this for a couple hours, so can I take a break?

Holmes: Absolutely. Yes, you can. [interview interruption]

Okay. So we're back from a break. We were just discussing the transitions and the maturation of the field. One of the areas I wanted to ask about, that we see really developing during the 1990s going forward, is what is known now as the Borderlands. Of looking at not just the Mexican American experience in the US, but also that transborder experience, which will then dovetail pretty nicely into the program that you develop at Arizona State.

02-01:46:48

Escobar:

Well, when I was conceiving how you taught Chicana and Chicano studies—and I sort of alluded to it earlier on—the earliest conceptions of it had to do with race. The underpinnings of it, the pillars, if you will, of the field were about race, class, maybe culture, but that was never really developed. But culture in a more sociological sense than expressive culture. Then in the eighties, we saw the development of gender as another pillar. You cannot understand the Chicano experience without using gender as a lens through which to look at that experience. To a certain extent, we didn't look at the border all that closely in the early years. Part of it, I think, resulted from the fact of just the demographic of the earliest practitioners. In the sense that, if I remember correctly, the Grebler, Moore, et al. book on Mexican Americans that was done in the 1960s [*The Mexican-American People: The Nation's Second Largest Minority*], a huge compendium of research, the best research that existed at the time. It stated that 18 percent of the Mexican-origin people living in the United States at that time were foreign-born. In other words, only 18 percent were Mexican born. As we moved into the twenty-first century, probably as early as the 1990s or so, that number had grown exponentially, probably to somewhere over 40 percent. You can't understand, especially the current situation, without understanding that experience. I sort of understood that even as a graduate student, because when I started school at UCR, US history was my primary field; but I picked Latin America as my secondary field, with a focus on Mexico. I think I said that in our last interview. Because you can't understand that overall experience, historical experience, together. Now, because most Chicanos in 1968, '69, 1970, the overwhelming majority,

were a generation or so removed from Mexico, it didn't make that much difference. But now it does. So you need to understand the Borderlands.

02-01:50:10

Gloria Anzaldúa's book was crucial for that. There've been numerous other people. The Borderlands had traditionally meant the Spanish Borderlands. You go back to the David Weber's work. But to a great extent, in terms of history, it was probably more eighteenth and nineteenth century, more than what was going on more recently. So Samuel Truett and others who are doing work there have been really important. My work in Arizona, it was clear that the border was crucial. So yeah, it is clear that I think, at least for the moment, borderlands should become, say, the fourth pillar. We went through a transition, which I think we'll go more into it in a little bit. But when we renamed the department—it had started out to be the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies. That was its original name. Then it went through a transition. When it became the Department of Transborder, Chicano, and Latino Studies, it was with the idea that transnationalism would be the fourth pillar upon which our curriculum would be based. So yeah, it's very important.

Holmes: Well, let's talk a little bit about your time at Arizona State. You leave Indiana, I believe, in 1993—

02-01:52:43

Escobar: Right.

Holmes: —and come down to ASU to eventually help form the school of Transborder Studies.

02-01:52:50

Escobar: Well, that's not exactly the way it happened. No.

Holmes: Okay. Well I know you were the founding chair of Chicana/o studies, if I'm correct. Well, why don't you tell us the story of how all of this happened.

02-01:53:10

Escobar: Okay. Sort of the genesis is that a group of faculty had gotten together at ASU and they had tasked Ray [Raymond] Padilla, who was in education there at the time, and Gary Keller, who ran the Bilingual Press that you may know of, and Chris [Christine] Marin, who was an archivist there, to develop a report. I remember getting the report, filling out a questionnaire of what Chicano studies was like at IU Northwest. Short response is, I said it was me. Then several months later, I got a phone call from a woman by the name of Mary Rothschild, who was a historian in the history department at ASU, had founded the women's studies program there, and was good friends with Vicki Ruiz. She called me and asked me to apply for the job of leading the effort to create a Chicano studies of-some-kind-or-another unit at ASU. I pondered it a bit and applied and moved through the process and was awarded the job. I should add that in that whole thing, I was very careful to make sure that they

understood that for me to come, they would also have to bring Gayle, because she was already taking a crack at IUN, and there was no way that I was going to move without both of us being in track. So I succeeded.

The way I succeeded in the job interview is I had done my research. I knew ASU sort of. I knew people like Cordelia Candelaria, who was, in fact, chairing the search. I didn't know Mary, but Gayle knew Mary from women's history. I knew [Francisco] Arturo Rosales and Chris Marin and a few other people who were already at ASU. From what I knew and what I thought about and my experience at other places, it became clear to me that establishing an independent unit, a department as opposed to a program or as opposed to, say, some loose confederation of faculty all over the place that would contribute to a major, that what they needed was the independence of a department that could control its own curriculum; it could find the resources that had the resources to staff that curriculum. In terms of structural administrative kinds of pitch that I gave when I went to the interview, was along those lines; strongly, that we needed a department, not any other kind of structure to do it. I think based on that and my previous administrative experience, particularly Stanford, and to a lesser extent, UCI, and the fact that I knew enough people there through my NACCS connections, and wonderful letters that I knew I received from colleagues like Vicki and David Gutiérrez and others, that they offered me the job. It was never any question that I would take it. It was hard—we left a wonderful community of friends that we're still friends with; but this was a much better opportunity and a better place for our kids to go to school. Indiana schools, public schools, were really bad. They were in Montessori and Montessori was running out for my son. So I got the job literally around Memorial Day, and we were there by the beginning of August.

02-01:57:51

I had the opportunity and pleasure to work with a really wonderful unit. So it was a committee of people that included Cordelia and Ray and Garry Keller and Chris Marin, a variety of other people from various disciplines—from psychology, literature. Really a broad array of people. We worked very hard, first, to develop our ideas. We bought in immediately to the idea of having a department. I set upon my task. My appointment was such that I was tenured in history; but half of my time was spent reporting directly to the provost on the development of this department, of the curriculum. So the first job was to develop the curriculum and develop the curriculum for a major and a minor. My job was to draft curriculum, draft the rationale, and so forth, and then the committee as a whole would revise and we'd move on. The curriculum that we developed was, by and large, a liberal arts curriculum, separated into social sciences and humanities. I should say that from the beginning, even before I arrived, Cordelia, who was sort of an interim person there—she's the one that chaired the committee that hired me—had set up an office and had convinced everybody that the name of the unit should be Chicana and Chicano studies. Then for reasons of saving ink, we agreed that we would use the slash to make it Chicana/o studies. I think we were the first ones to use that. I don't know

that anybody else had done it before that. I should say that it is exactly at this time that UCLA is developing their Chicano studies department. They went through a rougher—. Actually, we were able to use them, in a way, to get everybody to agree. I don't know if you know about the development of the Cesar Chavez Center, but they had sit-ins—

Holmes: It was a struggle, for sure.

02-02:00:54

Escobar:

It was a struggle. At ASU, I have to say, I was surprised at the lack of struggle that I had. First of all, I had this great committee that was working. We met once every two weeks for about two hours and hashed over different issues and worked at developing the curriculum. It had students' involvement, it had staff involvement. They're really a wonderful group of people to work with. I had support from the history department. My history faculty were super supportive. They put me through as much work as they possibly could get out of me, but we were good. I had super supportive friends and colleagues there. The central administration was also, starting with Lattie Coor, who was president at the time, and Milt [Milton] Glick, who I reported to directly. He wasn't crazy about the idea of a department, because he knew—among the other things—that if we had a Chicano studies department, pretty soon there would be calls for an African American studies department, for an Asian studies department, and so on and so forth. And he was right. He said, "This is going to happen." I go, "Yeah." I didn't say it quite as crudely, but that's why you get paid the big bucks; you get to deal with that one, I don't. But this is what we're doing.

The curriculum we developed, for reasons that I think I've shared already, was, as I said, largely liberal arts, with the idea that the liberal arts would give students the basis for doing many more things than a more rigidly applied kind of curriculum. The rationale that we used had to do with preparing students, all students, to deal with the diverse nature of American society. It is diverse. There's nothing you're going to do about it; you might as well get used to it, and you might as well do what you can to be as knowledgeable of these communities, so that you can be of assistance. And in particular, to train a—do I dare use the word—cadre of graduates that could go out and be change makers in the community, to be able to become teachers, social workers, politicians, whatever the case might be; that they needed to go ahead and do the work. That was the intent of the curriculum. Later, we came to say that what we were doing was giving students the content, the theory, and the methodology to go out and be intellectual warriors in the Chicano community. That's what we did, and we were successful, in a time, right after Prop 187 in California; at a time when we had very conservative legislature [in Arizona]—which it continues to be—and state government; and in this case, board of regents. The president of the board of regents, when I was going up, actually had said that what he wanted to do was do away with tenure at the universities.

But here, I have to give credit to both Lattie Coor and Milt Glick, who made the case for us. They made it hard for us. We told them that—. I told Lattie at a meeting once that I was going to make a compelling case for a department. He just shook his head. He wrote to us once and said, "We're in trouble. I don't know that I can get this passed." We went out of our way to make the proposal even all that better, so that it was compelling, and the regents approved it. They approved it unanimously, and approximately a year later, they approved—again unanimously—the departmental structure. Along the way, I should add that we also, before we went further—and again, this is from my observations earlier—we demanded a firm commitment of the resources that we would need in the long term to create the department, to make it successful.

Holmes: So in a sense, those were one of the lessons you learned from your time at Stanford—

02-02:06:20

Escobar: Yeah, from Stanford and in other—. Yeah, right. Well, it wasn't about Stanford, but it was all the other places that I had seen.

Holmes: Yeah, that's what I mean, from your position at Stanford, the traveling around.

02-02:06:32

Escobar: Yeah, yeah, right. That we had the resources. We had a commitment of the resources and the independence. What being a department gave you is the ability to hire and promote your own people. So that, we thought, was important. President, fine, he endorsed it; the provosts, a little bit more reluctantly, but nonetheless endorsed it and made it happen and gave the resources. That was the creation of the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies, which remained that for a dozen years. I was followed by, first, Vicki [Ruiz]. Well, the other thing to say is that for the most part, the resources we were allocated, the promises that we got would be the hired assistant professors. But we knew that from, again, past experiences and bringing in people who're trying to finish dissertations, again, or even who had finished dissertations, are trying to get tenured, and who also try to run a department, is a road to disaster. So immediately, three of us moved our lines over into the department. Nick [Nicolás] Kanellos, who runs Arte Público Press, told me I was crazy for doing that. But we did it anyway, because we thought that only by bringing in senior people to actually do the heavy lifting, could we then protect the assistant professors well enough so that they could be successful in their careers. But first, myself; Cordelia Candelaria, from English; and Ray Padilla, from education, we moved our lines over. Eventually, Vicki moved her line over partially from history and became the chair of the department. I did it for four years. I should add that I got sick at the end of those—. Along the way, I came down with Valley fever. Are you familiar with what Valley fever is?

Holmes: Oh, yeah.

02-02:09:09

Escobar:

Got really, really sick. Literally, I had pneumonia on the day we met with the regents. The black suit that I was wearing—it was November, so it wasn't bad—was literally soaked through with sweat because I was so sick. And Ray Padilla, from education. We moved our lines over. A littler later, Miguel Montiel, who was in social work in the school of public programs, moved his line over, as well, as I said, so that we had Vicki. So we had five people at the top, five senior people who could take up the load, as well as others, when we began hiring assistant professors. And under both Vicki and later, Cordelia, the department grew. We brought in more people. We brought in people in the arts, we brought in people in political science, literature.

I stepped down in '97. Vicki was from '97 to '01; and Cordelia from '01 to '05; and that's when Carlos came in. When Carlos came in, he made it very clear—. We ran a search. It was a national search, and we had a tremendously wonderful, robust group of people that applied for the job. We were very exciting at the time. We were the go-to place. The thing about recruiting at a place like Arizona, you bring people out for interviews in the winter. And we were poaching. Carlos came out on top and got the job. Carlos was immensely qualified. But one of the things with Carlos is that he believed that we needed to introduce a transnational perspective, for the reasons we talked about before. We understood this was the case. He gave us a stack, oh, maybe only that big, of manuscripts making the case. We all read, we debated, and agreed that the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies should be renamed, with a somewhat new curriculum. The idea being, if you hire someone and you know exactly what it is that their priorities are, that they come in sort of this is part of their platform, if you will, then you have to honor that. We knew that Carlos wanted to do this, we knew his ideas, and we offered him the job. We knew that we had to do this, and we had to engage him. So we engaged him and we changed the name of the department.

That was a long discussion, calling it transborder rather than transnational. Chicana-A-O, and Latina-A-O, studies. And we added the transborder because we wanted to be faithful to our implicit promise when Carlos came, because he said, "If I'm coming here, we're going to do this." We wanted to be faithful to that. And Latino for two reasons. One, in the broader community, the Central American community was broadly represented. So there was a demographic argument, demographic reason for it. Then the other reason was that so much of the literature outside of history focuses around Latino, particularly in the social sciences. The databases, all the data, whether you're in political science, whether you're doing elections or you're doing health—everything is aggregated into the term Latino or Hispanic or something else. All these social scientists that we brought in, that's the work that they're doing. It just reflected the reality of the literature in a lot of the areas. Even in literature, the main anthologies that are out there really compare—and I did a

lot of this in Indiana, we incorporated Chicano and Puerto Rican, but also Dominican writers and a whole variety of other people. So it reflected the reality of how the intellectual resources were evolving.

Holmes: I wanted to ask about your experience there, in that you decided to make your own department. The debate I was referencing earlier, there are those who sided and pursued that same avenue, such as yourself, of a department—and what becomes a school—of Latina/o studies versus those who pull from other departments. That's what they would call integrationists—right? In the process of developing this at Arizona State, were there those who sided with the integrationist school of thought? Were there arguments about how are we supposed to network with other departments?

02-02:17:09

Escobar: The provosts and some of the deans would argue that way. Partly because of resources. But the counter argument was a simple one. It was 1993, 1994. Where are these people? They're not in all of these various departments, or they're isolated in these various departments. We had one person in English, two people in Spanish, sort of one person in political science, sort of one person in sociology. You had two of us—three when you add Vicki—in history. History was the most robust. You could go down the line and look at all these people. It hadn't happened. This was twenty-five years after the genesis of the field, and ASU hadn't done anything. It was clear that the departments, left to themselves, weren't going to do anything. That was the easy argument.

Holmes: Yeah, that's a good argument.

02-02:18:12

Escobar: On a broader scale, I think it still holds. Even, in a way, more so today. I'm not sure. We talked about being a post-ethnic, post-racial society. I think for some people, it's easier to think that way and you forget it. There were once three of us in history. At the moment, there's nobody. They may be searching for someone else. We do have people that do Mexico. But that's not the same as doing Chicanos. That was the case in some of the other units, as well. I'm thinking of Spanish, in sociology. You could just go down the line in the other units, that they weren't there. So in some ideal universe, that might be a good idea, but you deal with the reality that you've got.

Holmes: Well, and at least the past two decades, it's proven itself and lasted in time, right?

02-02:20:02

Escobar: Subsequently, I had discussions with history, as recently as ten years or so ago, they were very reluctant. I think Arturo was getting ready to retire; I was pretty much full-time now in Chicano studies, and they were very reluctant to hire anybody else.

Holmes: I wanted to talk a little bit about your forthcoming book, as well as get some of your reflections.

02-02:20:49

Escobar: Let me say something controversial first.

Holmes: Sure, the floor is yours.

02-02:20:53

Escobar: I want to argue with my dear friend. In about 2010, we transitioned to the School of Transborder Studies. That, I believe, was a mistake.

Holmes: Talk a little bit about that. So there's the department and then the School of Transborder Studies.

02-02:21:17

Escobar: That's right. So essentially, what happened is, during the '08 Great Recession, ASU, at the unit level, went through a reorganization, where they started clumping together units and turning them into schools. I don't know what this meant to be, but anthropology went through a name change; all these places went through a name change. In terms of history, there had been three units—philosophy, religious studies, and history. They pulled them all together—great resistance and anger—into the School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies, which is what Matt Garcia ran. So there was all this dynamic of moving towards schools, and somehow that gave you greater status. Although about the only thing that it meant was that there were more units involved. But that sort of happened in other departments, as well.

Well, we got to the point where had a discussion about that, and according to Carlos, we had the green light to become a school, but we had to come up with a different name. The name that Carlos essentially demanded and got, was the School of Transborder Studies. The problem with that is that it sort of bifurcated our identity, internally among ourselves—. What exactly do we do? Is the focus really on Mexico? To what extent do we start putting resources into the study of Mexico and the border? And to what extent does that take away from the study of the real issues in health? I forgot to add that when we went through the earlier reorganization of the curriculum, we set up three areas of concentration. One in Latino health, one on immigration and public policy, and one on media and cultural expression. Students would have to pick one of those. It was to give them more focus, and the idea was to give them a little bit more marketability in the long run. I think actually, that helped. But those decisions of how to develop those three concentrations were based totally on the personnel, the faculty personnel we had onboard, their areas. So it was personnel-driven rather than some broader intellectual decision. But it made sense at the time, and as I said, it worked. But it sort of locked you into that.



02-02:24:51

The other problem now, to go back to the transborder concept, is that you start wondering about resources and how they're being allocated. Which meant sort of the activist, the social-change aspect, the idea of developing these intellectual warriors with the skills to go out and work in the community was, to a certain extent diminished, because it wasn't clear what we were supposed to do there. It sort of divided the faculty, as well. We started lacking coherence in what we did. On a pure branding level, students didn't have—. I talked to many students, and we had staff members who talked to a lot of students, who don't know what transborder studies is. Write transborder into your Windows document; you'll get a squiggly red line underneath. Nobody knows what it is. Students don't know what it is. We lost a sense of identity. That hurt branding, and that hurt enrollments on down the line. So we had an argument about it and I made that argument—several of us did—but it's not the way it went.

Holmes: Well, I wanted to talk a little bit about your scholarship, as we're kind of drawing here towards the end. The part two of the LAPD project.

02-02:26:44

Escobar: Yeah, I'm happy to do that.

Holmes: Then we'll get some of your reflections on the state of the field.

02-02:26:52

Escobar: Okay.

Holmes: So the forthcoming book, the tentative title, *Drawing the Thin Blue Line*?

02-02:27:01

Escobar: Yeah, I changed it to drawing.

Holmes: Oh, I'm sorry.

02-02:27:03

Escobar: Excuse me. I changed it to crossing.

Holmes: Oh, *Crossing the Thin Blue Line: Chicano-Police Relations Since World War II*. Of course, when you published the first book, you realized you had so much research, so many stories to tell. Then slowly, over the years, you were working on this second manuscript. Which, as you pointed out, also resulted in a number of highly regarded and celebrated articles. Let's see. In 1993, "The Dialectics of Repression: The Los Angeles Police Department and the Chicano Movement," which was the first—I think as you pointed out—the first article on Chicano history in the *Journal of American History*.

02-02:27:49

Escobar: That's right.

Holmes: Which is amazing to think about.

02-02:27:52

Escobar: Yeah, it was pretty late, right? Again, 1993.

Holmes: That's interesting, because I think in our first session, we even talked about it. Remember that in 1973, the *Pacific Historical Review* did a special edition on Chicano history.

02-02:28:04

Escobar: Right.

Holmes: And the *JAH*, twenty years later, the first article is coming out.

02-02:28:10

Escobar: I know.

Holmes: But that's how things go.

02-02:28:13

Escobar: It went there. I remember Matt [Garcia] and I talking about the numbers, the ones that have come out since. They've done better since, but that was—partly, that was topical. That was a year out of my life, by the way, in writing that article. As I mentioned earlier, it was like, you should write articles instead of this. So I wrote that and got back positive reviews. David P. Thelen, I believe, was the editor at the time. He was very encouraging. He liked it a lot. Told me to focus on social movements, so I started reading more on social movements and fashioned the article around those kinds of notions. Again, I had long thought that I didn't want to write about victimization alone. That was not what I saw myself doing. I wanted to do something that explained—. To me, the reality was, is that there is a dialectical relationship between repression and activism and identity formation.

Earlier, you had asked about the nineteenth century. Go back about the nineteenth century experience. So when in 1850, you had Tejanos, you had Californios, you had whatever. But then by 1900, you have people who saw themselves as Mexican. That identity formation, had to do with the fact that they were being treated *as* Mexicans. The sense of Mexican identity was one that developed through the struggles, through people seeing that their lot was, to a great extent, determined by their Mexican-ness; but also understanding that to do anything about that, to improve it, they had to come together exactly around this notion. This is an early idea of the Chicano movement, the Chicano activists. I remember in interviews that I did while on the Ford grant, with people like Raul Ruiz, who is also at Northridge and a major activist, and was there for the blowouts. He said, "What we really wanted to do was to highlight for people the terrible situation, and to get them to organize around culture." And organizing around culture has difficulties, because notions of culture, as we were talking about earlier, have to do also with patriarchy. Or

can be reinforcing, reifying some of those patriarchal notions. But still, this is something that has been going on for a long time. My point being that this dialectical relationship,—really, its genesis was in the '93 piece.

Holmes: Then you wrote a piece in the *Pacific Historical Review*.

02-02:32:57

Escobar: Yes.

Holmes: "Bloody Christmas and the Irony of Police Professionalism." That was awarded the best article in urban history, by the Urban History Association.

02-02:33:08

Escobar: Yes.

Holmes: This has to do with Bloody Christmas, a beating in 1951 and the kind of resulting movement for—as I think you even mention—police reform and professionalism, what we see in the fifties.

02-02:33:23

Escobar: And this is a major component of the new book. Essentially, what you had was a profession that was, for the most part, through most of the nineteenth century—. Now, the first police department was in London, in the 1820s; and then American police departments were formed in the decades after that. There was no organization, no science, no nothing about them. Going into the twentieth century, the LAPD—it had barely been formed in the 1880s, when LA was essentially a little cow town. But as Los Angeles grew, the LAPD became tremendously corrupt and brutal. But this was true of police departments across the country. It wasn't until the police professionalism movement began to emerge, other attempts by urban elites to reform police departments—. But this was a movement that arose from within the ranks of police themselves, to professionalize the department, to professionalize police. And by that they meant, among other things, to make them roughly equal to medical doctors and lawyers—those two professions. I think without a doubt, the proponent that was the most influential, in both thinking about it and implementing police professionalism, was Bill Parker.

Parker became chief in 1950. There had been an interim chief, but the previous regular chief had been ousted because of corruption within the department. He came in to clean things up. So his position early on was somewhat tentative. When this scandal broke of these kids being beaten, amid several other charges of police brutality and with Ed Roybal on the city council as an independent Mexican American who was able to voice concern over these things, the police department was put into crisis mode. The whole professionalism model, which included a great deal of autonomy for police. Parker was the originator of the first internal affairs division, where the idea was police control themselves. All these systems were being set up. They were put into jeopardy by this scandal, where several dozen or so police

officers were involved in the beating of these four young men, on a drunken party on Christmas Even of 1951. It didn't break until the following year, until March of the following year. The police department, like so many other institutions when under attack, sort of went into itself and started protecting themselves. What was threatened was both Parker's tenure as chief, but also the whole professionalism experiment. What was being called into question was police autonomy. So this is not totally new, but it had never been articulated quite as well. What Parker was able to do—his counter strategy, political counter strategy, was to label critics of the police department as enemies of the police. He developed, literally in the midst of this battle that went on for months, with trials and everything else, the idea, this notion of the thin blue line.

02-02:38:28

That sort of became the controlling metaphor—not just for the LAPD, but you see it in many places today—for what police do. The idea of the thin blue line—. It has various components in it, but the first thing that the line does is divide the populace into two areas: good, God-fearing Americans, which to a great extent, meant white middleclass America, at least in the way it was presented; and on the other side of the thin blue line are the enemies of civilization, the barbarians. This included, probably most prominently in the early days, organized crime; but then also increasingly, minorities; so-called subversives; leftists. And actually, anybody who criticized the police became then an enemy. So what you see—and this developed out of that—Parker and the police department got out of the scandal. They were able to essentially engage in a massive coverup that included perjury in trials. They limited the number of people that were actually punished. Maybe only half of the number of people that were actually involved in the beatings, and they eventually came out of it at the other end.

But in the meantime, something that had been developing over time anyway, was developing this schism between the police and the rest of the community. Because blue was obviously the uniform; the line divides; but the thin was meant to notion the precarious nature. That they are a thin blue line. How vulnerable police are. That's the word that I wanted. Thin, then, relates to the vulnerability of police themselves in protecting the rest of society. Well, which in turn, gives them the right to use whatever force is necessary to protect white society. To protect white society, that's the other side of the thin blue line. Which has a direct correlation to everything that we're seeing today.

So I'm a bit of a junkie about LAPD programs. I guess that shouldn't be too surprising. There's a program called *Bosch* on Amazon Prime. They're based on Michael Connelly's books. He's a crime writer, a novelist. He's not James Ellroy, but he sells a lot of books. Anyway, there's this character, Bosch. Amazon has a series that they do. But in the last one, it was really interesting, in the sense that it dealt with the possible police—. It's a police procedural, in the classic sense, where the police go in and where the civil rights attorney

who's bringing a big lawsuit against the LAPD is killed. He's prosecuted lots of these; everybody assumes it was a police officer who did it. They go through the various police procedural points to do it. But there are protests. Black Lives Matter-like people are out protesting in front of the police station. The mayor goes to talk to the chief of police about it. The mayor is about the only Latino on the show. Goes to talk to the chief of police about it and tells him he's actually going to be with the demonstrators. The chief of police tells him that therefore, the mayor is his enemy; his boss is his enemy. Which is a very scary idea, if you think that what police have is, they can legitimately use force against us, and against a mayor. In fact, doesn't use force against him, but he creates a scandal against him.

Holmes: Yeah, I've seen the advertisements for this show.

02-02:43:45

Escobar: It's sort of okay. It's your classic police procedural; there's nothing really great there. But it's fun for me.

Holmes: I wanted to have you reflect on the field before we end, but I wanted to also ask, because you brought it up, Black Lives Matter—. I know you've been doing some speaking on these topics and times. Many of these themes that you have been discussing now for decades really come to the fore in society today. Do you address some of these? Or are what we seeing today, like we saw with your first book, these were developments that were slowly evolving and building up, and that what we have today is—?

02-02:44:57

Escobar: Well, I think obviously, the Bloody Christmas article goes back to—what—2002, something like that?

Holmes: Yes.

02-02:45:09

Escobar: I think at the end of it, I sort of say it leads to this ongoing hostility. Yeah. I actually started writing an op-ed piece on what I just told you about, the *Bosch* thing. Then I decided that not enough people see that. I wanted to write, a similar op-ed piece addressing some of these issues when back in 2015, New York Mayor [Bill] de Blasio went and gave a eulogy about a police officer who had been killed in action, perhaps assassinated, and the police officers in question turned their back on him.

Holmes: I remember that.

02-02:45:58

Escobar: But that was back in 2015. I was running the school at the time. But I wanted to write a piece about why that is so dangerous. Why the idea of having an armed force turning their backs on their bosses, elected officials, is a very dangerous thing for a society. The Brits understood it when they didn't give

the London municipal police department guns when they first began. That was why; because they saw it as a danger to democracy. We know the things that J. Edgar Hoover did as director of the FBI for all those years, and the massive misconduct that he engaged in against a whole variety of different people. And were able to get away with this, because they have the power to use force against citizens. They're the only agency that can do that, and to give them autonomy is dangerous. Then there's whole other things that have to do with training and a variety of other things. I think that yes, what I'm doing now will help explain a lot of that. But I'm a historian. It'll take another venue, within which to put forth policy recommendations.

Holmes: Well, now that we're kind of here towards the end, I wanted to get some of your thoughts and reflections. Not just on your career, but also on the future of Chicana/o studies. The field has come a long way from teaching the first classes, be it at Mount Holyoke, to even your first lectureship at UC Riverside in the 1970s. In your view, what really have been some of the major developments in the field, looking over these past couple decades, that you've seen?

02-02:49:05  
Escobar:

Well, the fact that it's developed. One of the reasons history was easy, in comparison to some of the other fields, was that we had a lot of historical records. We had this place—we had [Hubert Howe] Bancroft's books. The interviews, the oral interviews that he did, or he had his people do. It's developed and it's any of a number of things. There still aren't a lot of Chicano, or even Latino-focused journals, more broadly. We have *Aztlán*, we have *Latino Studies*; there might be one or two others that are out there doing something. So there's that.

One of the things that's developed is—and I meant to mention it earlier—the broad acceptance, among at least the academic publishers, of the viability of doing Chicano-Latino-based books. I was at a Ford Foundation conference of some kind or another. Both Nick Kanellos, who ran Arte Público Press, and I were Ford Fellows that year, and we had a series of representatives telling us how to publish, about where to take our work. The idea was that the Ford Fellows would meet publishers, and you could talk about your meeting. And we were told that there's little interest and little marketability in Chicano-related things. Well, Nick and I humiliated these people. Now that's not the case. You see a number of major presses—obviously UC, North Carolina, Duke, obviously Texas, and others—embracing and understanding the viability of the field. You see the broadening of the field into a variety of venues. Just to talk about the young scholars that I work with at Arizona, people working in literature, people working in health, scientists. We just lost an assistant professor who's doing work on how biomarkers—in this case, saliva taken from people's mouths—can be used to demonstrate the levels of stress that lead to long-term health problems among immigrants that fear immigration [enforcement]. In other words, being able to demonstrate

scientifically, how these immigration policies that are being pursued by the [Donald] Trump administration right now are having negative consequences on the health of families, including children. Who'd have thought of that a few years ago? I just mentioned that for a minute, because she was at Yale. She's left ASU to be at UMass because her husband teaches at Yale. Other people in education, dealing with the impact of microaggressions, again, on learning among both Mexican-origin, Mexican immigrant, and even indigenous Mexicans living in the United States. The whole proliferation of queer studies work that's being done by a number of people and looking at LGBT people who are also Latino—that's something we never considered in 1980, 1990. All of these things. And it's because we've been doing our work.

02-02:54:04

Maybe these people were not Chicano studies majors or Latino studies majors, but they were impacted by the work that we were doing. Maybe they took a class here or a class there; maybe their instructors, wherever they started undergraduate school, did some of that, as well. It's hard to know. So what you see is the broadening of the field into areas such as health and reproduction and other areas that you never would've thought of before, into the work that, say, Desirée Garcia is doing on cinema. Or of how Mexican and Mexican American themes have played out in other areas. You can go on and on in the arts, in literature, history and the social sciences, looking at various things. We've also become, I think, more self-reflective. We've become less iconic. The obvious case is Matt's [Garcia] book on Cesar Chavez. If there is an icon, it's him. Isn't there a street out here somewhere? Yet we need to understand that the man was a human being, like anybody else, and had his faults and made mistakes that may have harmed his own cause. We could go on. But it's matured to that point. I don't see it in every area, but we're moving in that direction.

Holmes:

You were talking about the published works, the larger embracement of the field by the academic community, of not just Chicano scholarship or Latino scholarship, but also the scholars themselves. And what I mean by this is not just organizations, but when you look at—at least in history, which we could speak of—when we look at someone like Al Camarillo or Vicki Ruiz who has been the presidents of major national organizations.

02-02:56:56

Escobar:

Yeah, absolutely. I think it's a recognition of obviously, the stellar quality of these two individuals—of the scholarship, but also a major acceptance—again, you would not have seen that a while back.

Holmes:

I wanted to also ask about activism in the field. Chicano studies, the field itself, in many ways, was very much linked, and kind of developed out of, the activism that we saw. Be it if we look at Carey McWilliams in the 1930s, the activism that's there somewhat; but particularly, what we're looking at is the sixties and seventies of the Chicano movement, if we wanted to say it in that

broad sense. In some sectors of the academy, that was more traditional—such as history, right? We're not supposed to be activists; we're scholars. How do you see that being negotiated as we move forward?

02-02:58:06

Escobar:

I think people do that on an individual basis. Some people feel very comfortable doing it; others do not. The idea of the public intellectual is an old one, and there are people who do that very well. Again, you don't want the assistant professors doing that; but once you move on a little bit—. So we all do it in some ways or another—addressing police issues, addressing voting issues. One of the people we hired at ASU, Lisa Magaña, has been very vocal and active in the media. She does immigration policy. For ten years now, since [Senate Bill] 1070 in Arizona, and all the anti-immigrant legislation in Arizona, has been very active. I don't think it hurts. There's a certain fear among, sometimes, administrators, that you're placing things into jeopardy because of backlash from legislatures. But I think it has to be done. It's crucial to who we are. And I think to a certain extent, the activism that we do, or our main activist effort, really, I think, can be training of that next generation, those intellectual warriors that are going to go forward and make a difference in the communities. At ASU, I know we did. We've got doctors, lawyers, teachers, all of these people, with the consciousness and the intellectual skills to go out and make a difference. We do that, that's our main job. To do these other things, well, it's up to the person.

Holmes:

I wanted to ask, lastly, if we're looking at the future of the field—which is always a hard question of, where should it go?

02-03:00:39

Escobar:

My standard joke, my standard response to that is, I'm a historian. I only predict the past.

Holmes:

Yes, yes.

02-03:00:45

Escobar:

But you've heard that one, huh?

Holmes:

I use a similar version myself. Which is why I didn't go into policy or political science, right?

02-03:00:56

Escobar:

That's right.

Holmes:

But thoughts on maybe needed changes. Because you did such a great job of just discussing here recently, of how the field really has matured, all the great accomplishments that we have seen over the decades. If you could, maybe just briefly, give your thoughts on what needed changes perhaps could happen for the field to continue that type of development. If there's changes that have crossed your mind or you've thought about.



02-03:01:32

Escobar:

Well, broadly speaking, that's sort of difficult because a lot of places are doing a lot of great things. No one place is doing everything right.

Holmes:

Or if we just keep supporting the programs?

02-03:01:56

Escobar:

Well, we've got to do that, yeah. That's a given. You have to stay there. I don't know that I have anything right now.

Holmes:

No, that's fine.

02-03:02:18

Escobar:

I'm sure as soon as I get on the train, I'll say, damn, I wish I'd thought of that. Well, clearly, greater efforts have to be made integrating the work that we're doing in with the traditional units. But that's a two-way street. I remember we had a meeting once with Michael Crow, who's the current president of ASU, who's also been very supportive, I have to say. As I mentioned to you earlier, both the dean of liberal arts and sciences and the provosts know who we are, are supportive of what we do; and the same is true for Michael Crow. But in meeting with him, we talked about all the things that we were doing. It was a small meeting. It ended up, I think it was just me and Carlos and perhaps Matt. We're talking about all the things we're doing and he says, "Well, there're all these other places out there, all these other units that are sort of spinning their wheels and are not privy to the work that you're doing on border or on immigration." Some of them are. To a certain extent, our faculty attempt to do it. I was well integrated in history. So was Matt. Various people talk about silos. Well, the problem is, as scholars, we're all in our individual silos. To the extent that we collaborate, we collaborate with people in other silos. And this is particularly true in the social sciences. Singular silos for historians, collaborative silos for social scientists. I think it's hard. One of the hardest things about Chicano studies and interdisciplinary studies is that we speak a different language across the disciplines. We're talking, we're using a word, acculturation. It means something totally different to them than it does to us. That happens. There's a whole underpinning of meaning that we give to language that doesn't transfer over, and sometimes that causes disagreement. Sometimes it just causes confusion. So what I'm suggesting about the better integration is a very hard to thing to do. Especially when people are locked into what they're needing to do to get tenure, complete that grant, get the next book out, whatever. It's difficult to do. So to a certain extent, this isn't a task just for Chicano studies to do. It's a task for universities to do, to create an atmosphere in which that happens better, without breaking apart the autonomy that individual units have. We sort of set up barriers, but for important reasons. Because people aren't getting tenure because their work isn't valued in some places versus others. Okay. I could go on, now that you got me going on that.

Holmes: Lastly, we all stand on the shoulders of others. I ask each interviewee, I want to give them the opportunity, to maybe recognize scholars within the field that have passed already, that they found that were important or influential to them, that they would like to recognize.

02-03:08:47

Escobar: Well, obviously, people like McWilliams, Galarza, Julian Samora. At Notre Dame, Sanchez. Those people are obvious. People like Gloria Anzaldúa, who died, prematurely. Everybody dies, but not everybody dies prematurely. But she certainly did. My friend Art Rosales, at ASU, died recently, a couple years ago now, of cancer. He is a fellow historian who went through so much. Never graduated from high school, got a degree in the Air Force, was an alcoholic; beat all that, to become a productive scholar. He was my friend, and he gave me insights into the community when I got to ASU—and into both the campus community and the broader community, because he was in Arizona—without any sense of self-aggrandizement, that were crucial to the success of being able to do what we did at ASU. So there's that. I was with him a week before he died. We were very close friends. I spoke at his eulogy.

I can talk about three people more off the top of my head, who were very important to me—and they're alive, thank God—at crucial moments. Rudy [Acuña], who instilled in me the need for activist scholarship. Activist pedagogy, not so much activist scholarship. Carlos Cortés, who was a mentor for me in just so many ways, and taught me how to be a historian, how to be a scholar, in very many ways. And Al Camarillo. He's the one that was my advocate at Stanford to get the job, and continued to support me and to help me finish my dissertation. I know people that were there—not a bad place to be—but who are still there at Stanford, who never left. But I was able to finish my dissertation, and then go on and do the things that I needed to do to have whatever success I had.

Holmes: Ed, it's been great. I thank you so much for your time.

02-03:11:57

Escobar: I have to say, it was a pleasure.

Holmes: Thank you, sir.

[End of Interview]