

Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez

*Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez: Reflections on a Career in Chicana/o Studies*

Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by  
Todd Holmes  
in 2019

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Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez

## Abstract

Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez is Regents Professor and founding director emeritus of the School of Transborder Studies at Arizona State University. Born and raised in Nogales, Arizona, Professor Vélez-Ibáñez received his PhD in anthropology from UC San Diego in 1975. In the years that followed, he held faculty positions at San Diego State University, UCLA, the University of Arizona, and UC Riverside before coming to Arizona State in 2005 to chair the Chicana/o Studies Department. In addition to serving as founding director of the School of Transborder Studies at ASU, he also helped found the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology at the University of Arizona and directed the Ernesto Galarza Applied Research Center at UC Riverside. He is the author of numerous publications within the field of Chicana/o Studies, including: "The Aged and the Political Process: An Anthropological Analysis of the Spanish-Speaking Elderly in the United States" (1973); *Rituals of Marginality: Politics, Process, and Cultural Change in Central Urban Mexico* (1983); *Bonds of Mutual Trust: The Cultural Systems of Rotating Credit Associations Among Urban Mexicans and Chicanos* (1983); *Border Visions: The Cultures of Mexicans of Southwest United States* (1996); *Transnational Latina/o Communities: Politics, Processes, and Culture* (2002); *An Impossible Living in a Transborder World: Culture, Confianza, and Economy of Mexican-Origin Populations* (2010); and *The US-Mexico Transborder Region: Cultural Dynamics and Historical Interactions* (2017). In this interview Professor Vélez-Ibáñez discusses: his family background and upbringing; his educational journey from high school to attending the University of Arizona; his early teaching in Mexican American Studies at San Diego State; his graduate experience at UC San Diego; 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 research centers he directed; the developing the School of Transborder Studies 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.



### **Advisory Council**

Miroslava Chávez-García [University of California, Santa Barbara]

Raúl Coronado [University of California, Berkeley]

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Irene Vásquez [University of New Mexico]

## Interview 1: January 4, 2019

01-00:00:03

Holmes: All right. This is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is January 4, 2019. I am sitting down with Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez, for the Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project. We are here at the School of Transborder Studies at Arizona State University in the beautiful city of Tempe, Arizona. Carlos, thank you so much for sitting down with me.

01-00:00:29

Vélez-Ibáñez: You're very welcome.

01-00:00:33

Holmes: In these interviews for this project, of course we're looking at your life and career, and getting your observations and insights on the development of Chicano studies, as well as your participation in that field as one of the first generation of scholars. But before we get into that, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and your family background.

01-00:00:56

Vélez-Ibáñez: Well, I'm the son of Sonorenses, before there was this great demarcation of the border here. My father's immediate family, the Vélezes, go back to the Spanish colonial period, both on the north side and the south side of what's now the border, and among the first Vélezes was Captain Vélez Escalante, who was the captain of the Presidio of Fronteras, which was really the Presidio of Santa Rosa de Corodéguachi, which is only about forty miles south of the present border. Other parts of the family were born in Ures, Arizpe, Altar, Tubutama, Tubac, and in Tucson, in the eighteenth century to the present. So, as a son of Sonorenses, then I have this deep-rooted notion of space and place, regardless of the kind of historical reinterpretations of this particular population.

I was raised and went to school in Tucson and I was born by mistake, in Nogales, Arizona. My mother was pregnant with me during the antediluvian period, and we were visiting relatives in Magdalena, Sonora, and on the way back, my mother started getting birth pangs, and she said to me later that I was always—in Spanish she said, "*Siempre eres muy inquieto*," that is, "you were always kind of a restless individual." As soon as we got across the border, I was born in St. Joseph's Hospital in Nogales, Arizona, and she said that my bassinette was placed right next to the window of the hospital, which right outside of the window was the cyclone fence that separated Nogales, Arizona from Nogales, Sonora. She said that my feet were placed south and my head north, and that's really where the kind of *transfronterizo* [cross-border] identity was grounded in the way the world works. Anyway, eight hours later, we were back in Tucson, where my parents were living, where we were living, and I was raised in Tucson, went to elementary schools, Salpointe High School. I completed an undergraduate degree at the University of Arizona, in English and political sciences, and then took a masters in English later, and

then the PhD at the University of California at San Diego in the 1970s, and that's basically the early history of how I really started all of this.

01-00:03:33

Holmes: Did you have any siblings?

01-00:03:35

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes, my sister Lucy, she passed away though, at age twenty-nine, from lupus, and of course dozens of cousins on both sides of the border. I had cousins in fact, who went to the University of Arizona, from Sonora, and I used to go to elementary school in Sonora during the summers, when we were on vacation in Tucson, and that's really where I learned Spanish very, very well, in elementary school.

01-00:04:02

Holmes: Maybe discuss a little bit about growing up in Tucson, in your family environment. From numerous talks and other writings, it seems that you've always had this transborder type of experience. Discuss that a little bit.

01-00:04:19

Vélez-Ibáñez: Well, for us it was not only normal, it was logical. The border, like I say now, is only two grandmothers old, that's it, so the passing back and forth was very simple, it was very easy, it wasn't a matter of trauma like it is now. So, visiting cousins was almost a monthly event, either us going to Magdalena or Magdalena coming to Tucson, and everything in between. And then there were always inter-marriages, constantly, between Tucson Mexicans and Sonoran Mexicans. As a matter of fact, that's why making tamales is so important, by the way, among Mexicans, because during that period when women are making tamales, they were in fact taking stock about who was married and who was not married, and who's eligible and who wasn't eligible. It's during those periods that many times, relationships between families from Sonora and families from Tucson, really were reproduced, through marriage. So you have literally, thousands of marriages occurring between Sonorenses from Hermosillo, Magdalena, Imuris, and Tucson and Nogales, and everything in between. So the networks of relationships were always very thick and very dense between families, so the border was more like stepping across the street for us, it wasn't a big thing to do. All you needed was a little piece of paper, either going south or going north, and whenever we stopped by the way, at the Aduana in Nogales, Sonora—and sometimes I would drive, when I was a little older, seventeen, eighteen years old, and they would look at my face and he says, "*Tu eres Vélez*," you're a Vélez, and then I would ask, "*Como lo sabes?*" Because of your eyebrows. So, the Vélez eyebrows in fact, evidently are the markers for identity in the trans-border way. So that just gives you an indication of the thickness of relationships, as well as the constant movement of the populations going back and forth.

I had cousins going to Salpointe High School and like I had mentioned before, I would attend elementary schools in Magdalena, and so that cross-border,

trans-border existence really formed part of my identity constantly, so English and Spanish were in fact for me, that is both languages, were not only necessary but they were imperative for my own sense of self. It's only when you went into elementary schools in Tucson, where they tried to drive Spanish out of you, that you became a foreigner and we used to be spanked for every word of Spanish that we spoke and we were swatted by the principal. It was a baseball bat that had been sawed off at the end, smoothed, and holes were punctured into it, and for every word of Spanish, you got a swat. So we created a game called the king and queen of swats, and so those who got the most swats during the week were declared king and queen by fellow students, and that's how we dealt with that, but the damage that that created then, was intense. I think for many of us, going through elementary school, where language is being basically driven out of us by physical force, if it hadn't been for Anglo teachers who were caring and loving, who would actually get in front of us physically while the principal was going by to check if we were speaking Spanish or not, and that's the only reason I'm sure, that we didn't become racists, was because some Anglo teachers themselves protected the innocent while others were complicit.

01-00:08:10

Holmes:

Oh, that's interesting. Talk a little bit about the community in Tucson.

01-00:08:17

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Very dense, very intense. The church was an imperative for this community and of course the south side of Tucson. South Tucson is an incorporated, one-mile square community, which is south of present Tucson, and then south of South Tucson an unincorporated area known as Government Heights became part of the city of Tucson later on. What was interesting about our neighborhoods was it was always changing, either with new populations of Sonorenses coming across the border, but it wasn't really coming across the border, it was just kind of stepping across the border. But there was also what occurred during the 1950s, and that is Tucson had been engaged in wartime industrial activities during the '40s, making B-17 and B-29 bombers. After the war, in the 1950s, they started recruiting people from the East Coast to maintain those industries, and so a lot of Irish families moved into Tucson, but because housing was so limited, many Irish families moved into our area of Government Heights with Mexican and Anglo families already there. So because most of them came from South Boston, they thought we were Italians, so they would call us disparagingly, they would call us WAPS, and we used to say to each other, "*que es esto WAPs*," "What does that mean?," you know this is the 1950s. So we would beat up on each other. These are tough, working-class Irish kids, trying to bang up against tough, working-class Mexican kids, until Father James Murphy, who was a Holy Ghost missionary, put together Boys Clubs and Girls Clubs, and then we started falling in love with each others' sisters and the fighting basically stopped. So I fell in love with Carol Anne McClean and Gloria Martinez at the same time, and I kept up this kind of transborder process in my personal relationships as well.

So the Irish kids—and this is one thing that's never talked about. The Irish kids became Mexicanized, it wasn't the other way around. Mexican kids didn't become Irish, it was the Irish kids that became Mexicanized, so to this day, Jimmy Murphy and Jackie Cox, who is no longer with us unfortunately, all these Irish kids acquired kind of Mexican accent in their English, and many of them spoke some Spanish. Even to this day, we greet each other with, shall we say, less than appropriate terminology in Spanish, and shake hands and hug each other, and so on. My mother used to refer to Jackie Cox as "Mi Pinky" because of his red hair and ruddy complexion. So that was a very interesting process that taught me later, to think about the notion of acculturation in a very different way. Rather than this one-way assimilationist notion that is promulgated constantly by an East Coast model of the way the United States works and the Americas work, is to think about acculturation as a two-way process, and so that taught me very early on, in a different kind of way than you would have been taught if you only listened to educational authorities of the period, about assimilation. Even to this day, everyone wants you to assimilate, to become this kind of singularly homogeneous personality. Well, the border region doesn't allow you to do that, but I learned that very on, to respond to your question, and that is the acculturation process was two-way.

01-00:12:16

Holmes:

Talk a little bit about high school.

01-00:12:20

Vélez-Ibáñez:

High school was interesting. I was not a good student. I was not a good student because I was bored, school bored me to death. I used to love to read, but I got tired of reading kind of stilted language text and so on, and so I was a terrible student—I'd say I was almost an average student, no more than that, but I got turned on by two nuns, to literature and also to science. One of them was—I still remember her—Sister Saint Eleanor, who was a BVM, they used to wear these square boxes for their habit, and she was tough as nails. She taught Latin and also, Sister Georgine Marie taught science and biology, and I really got interested in science because of her. Then there was Sister Saint Joseph, who was the librarian, and she really turned me on to further reading, because as a kid, I read both in English and Spanish.

My mother was a devotee of the Maryknoll Missionaries, but the Maryknoll Missionaries were really an odd lot, because they were very Left, so my mother was a real Lefty, although she came from an Army stock. Her father was a brigadier general of the Mexican Army, and was killed at the Battle of las Vacas in Coahuila, during the revolution, and the revolution of course itself, was very important for us as well, both for and against the participants in that, because my grandfather, my mother's father, was killed in the revolution during one of the battles with Francisco Villa. So my mother was very anti-villista, but she was a Lefty who supported, in her own mind, Zapata, because he had manners. What she meant by that was that when the villistas would come into a town, they would break the door down; when the

Zapatistas came into town they would knock on the door, and so her gestalt in the Mexican Revolution was surrounded around that. At the same time that my grandfather was being killed, my grandmother in fact was treating young revolutionaries in her courtyard, plugging up their wounds with pillowcases and bed sheets while they were dying and calling for their mothers.

My mother was this terrific influence of contradictions, so I think one of the things that I learned very early on, was not to think about things around you as being of a single sort, and that point of view really comes right out of my mother's experiences of her in the revolution, but also in her own sense of existence in Tucson, because my mother spoke in fractured English. My father was completely bilingual, he was raised in Tucson and went to high school and so on, but my mother, she taught herself English and she taught herself concert level piano as well, she was a brilliant woman. So she provided this sense of complexity to my sister and myself that really reflected the history of the region itself, she personified this region, as my dad did, in different kinds of ways. That made me very attentive to differences, it made very attentive to heterogeneity, rather than to having a sense of the sameness. And in high school I resented having to be the same, having to acquiesce either to a single religious ideology, which I thought was pretty ridiculous, Catholicism, and all of the trappings with all of that, but I really respected the nuns for two things I think. One, because of their sense of selves, their womanhood. Reflecting back on what I learned, they demanded respect as women, not just as nuns but as women, and they demanded respect of their knowledge. So womanhood and knowledge. When you add Salpointe High School's nuns, who were women and highly knowledgeable and educated, and my mother's quest for education and for learning and for constant reading and so on, then the two jelled for me, and so I always had a notion of not women as equals but women as more than "women," but as people, as a person, as personhood. I always had a sense and that comes from my mother and from my sister as well and from these nuns.

01-00:17:27

Holmes:

During this time too, in the early 1950s, when you're going to high school, is also the beginnings of not just civil rights mobilization but particularly, mobilization within the Mexican American community, such as the GI Forum and LULAC. Discuss how you saw that operating within the community and maybe your thoughts on that kind of mobilization for civil rights.

01-00:18:10

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Well, high school students, we didn't participate much in that at all. It wasn't until later, probably not until the late sixties really, where I started participating. Very early on, there were different kinds of things that were very important in creating a kind of underlying architecture for what came later, and that is I saw unfairness, from my early childhood, in regards to the way my dad especially was treated at work. My dad was a mechanic and he was a craftsman, and he comes from a long line of craftsmen as well. My

grandfather had a carriage factory in Magdalena, Sonora, and he had fifty men that in fact made carriages, as well as mining wagons, and he would sell those to Federico Ronstadt in Tucson. Federico Ronstadt is Linda Ronstadt's grandfather and Federico Ronstadt and my grandfather, Manuel Vélez, were compadres, and that's because of the association and relationship of the old Viejo Sonorenses.

Federico Ronstadt himself was born in Delicias, Sonora, of a German father and Mexican mother, and went to Tucson to learn the latest techniques in making carriages in the late nineteenth century. My grandfather already was doing that and he was selling those carriages later on, to Federico Ronstadt, and Federico Ronstadt would take his plate off, his name plate off of the wagons, and then put his own on there and sell them as if they were his own. As a matter of fact, there's a wagon at the Arizona Historical Museum, when you go into the door there's a green surrey and that surrey was made by my grandfather, sold by Federico Ronstadt later on. So anyway, that gives you a sense of the cross-border trade and commerce, because in fact, that carriage factory in Magdalena was really one of the first *maquiladoras* from the late nineteenth century, into the early twentieth century, before the invention of the car. The car drove them out of business, so they transformed themselves from being carriage makers to mechanics, and they opened then, service stations and gas stations and garages, and that's how my dad became a mechanic, and so he worked all his life. He was in fact also, a Western Union delivery boy, for Western Union in Tucson, he worked for Jacome's Department Store as a salesperson and you could see, his picture is right over here, that was called La Bonanza.

01-00:21:18

So my dad had all of these experiences and his English was perfect and his Spanish was perfect. And he would always come home and revel about the excellence of his work, not bragging but he would say, "Do you know what I did today? I fixed this enormous transmission." And what was interesting about him is that he could tell when a tooth of a gear was worn without looking beyond the case of the transmission itself, by just listening to the way the gears were turning, and he could tell which one was used up and which one was broken, and so he was this expert in differentials and in transmissions, so his computational knowledge was terrific. He was a wonderful mathematician and as a matter of fact, he invented a perpetual motion machine that I have somewhere in my house, and so his computational sense was really great. One day he came home, he was very sad, and he told my mother that he had asked for a raise at work and the foreman told him to go back to Mexico if he didn't like what he was getting paid. He never came home again talking about his work. That's how deep then, this kind of ethnocentrism was, displayed in many, many different ways. And so you had that differential payment of people, it's pretty much of a constant in Tucson and in the mines and all over Arizona. The mines used to have a Mexican rate

and then there was a laborer's rate, and the laborer's rate was higher than the Mexican rate, regardless of whether you were born in the United States or whether you were born in Mexico, as long as you were of Mexican origin. And so, I saw that very early on.

The other aspects that really impressed me were the immigration raids. Operation Wetback occurred in the 1950s and I remember vividly, that my mother used to dress us—used to dress me especially, and my dad as well—they would put a tie on me and a suit of some sort and I hated the suit because it was made out of tweed and it itched like mad. The reason she did that is she wanted to make sure that the immigration authorities, many times, they used to wait outside of the church to pick people up, and so they would differentiate us from braceros, or people who had overstayed their visa. This is the 1950s now. So I saw that very early on and these kinds of impressions stuck with me.

But that's the negative side of it. The positive side is that we lived a transborder life all the time, even downtown. Downtown Tucson really had a Mexican side and had an Anglo side as well. We used to go to the theaters, we used to go to the Spanish language theaters to see Mexican movies on Friday nights, and then on Saturdays, across the street on Congress Street, there was a second run, Lyric Theater, where my sister also worked by the way, that featured second run movies in English. So our English and our Spanish was very much influenced by Mexican movies and American movies, so a lot of the idiom in Spanish, we picked up in the movies, and a lot of the idioms in English, we picked up from the movies across the street. So we lived a transborder life constantly and that's really the richness as well.

01-00:24:56

The discrimination, the ill treatment on the jobs, the awful swatting of children in elementary schools, the constant being subjected to intelligence tests to see how smart or how dumb you were, and that was part of this whole process of allocating children according to some kind of performance measure which was false because in fact, most of the tests were in English, not in Spanish, were offset by the density and wealth of social relationships in the community itself. And it wasn't the political strength, but rather the cultural and social strength of the communities, that really kept us in even kilter and didn't allow us to become racists and ethnocentric, although very frankly, there was ethnocentrism, especially against African Americans, in that community as well. The old Spanish racism was still very much part of those communities as well. Grandmothers would ask of a newborn child, "What's the child like?" What they meant was, was the child fair or darker, and that kind of old Spanish imperial Mexican caste racism became coupled to American racism, which comes from an entirely different direction, it comes from the South. So that community had to deal with that and that was very much part of it, and we were all subjected to that in one way or another. You



were both victim and victimizer. The transborder region itself called for this multiplicity and complexity of not only relationships but of attitudes and points of view.

01-00:26:52

Holmes:

That's interesting. Let's talk a little bit about your undergraduate years at the University of Arizona. Were you the first of your family to attend college?

01-00:26:03

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Yes. Yes, but that was driven into me very early on and it literally was driven in every summer. Tucson got very hot and we didn't have refrigeration, we had swamp coolers at best, if you had them, and you only had one for the house. So on Sundays, my dad and my sister and my mom and I would drive to the University of Arizona. My dad had a Model A Ford, a little Model A with a bed in the back, and of course the seats themselves, you could only seat three people in the little Model A Ford itself, but the seat itself had a space where I could lie down, next to the back window, so I would look out. Anyway, so we would go around the University of Arizona, where they had the sprinklers on, because they had grass and they had palm trees and all the rest of it. So we used to drive around the University of Arizona and get cooled off.

So, I remember one day, I was about five, and I asked my dad about all these buildings and I said, "*Que son estos edificios?*", "What are these buildings for?" And my dad said in Spanish, "*Ahi esta todo la sabedoria del mundo,*" "There lies all the world's knowledge." And then I popped out, and I have no idea how or why or the reason for and I said, "*Voy a trabajar alli,*" "I'm going to work there." And sure enough, many years later, after I had become an anthropologist, I became a professor at the University of Arizona for ten years, as a professor of anthropology and also a director of Bureau of Applied Research and Anthropology. That's really the genesis of my interest in learning, not just learning but being part of the university, was our driving around the University of Arizona, and my sister especially harping on me constantly that I was going to go to college, although she didn't go to college herself, but she kept harping, "You're going to go to college, you're going to go to college." I didn't know what college was, you know for me it was the man on the moon, but nevertheless, I was instilled very, very young with the love of learning, both by my dad and my mom.

01-00:29:18

Holmes:

You majored in political science. What drew you to that field?

01-00:29:24

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Actually, international relations is what drew me to that field. It wasn't American politics, it was in fact international relations, and by accident, or by circumstances or serendipitously, I took a class by a professor by the name of Neal D. Houghton, who was a political scientist and an expert in international relations and American international politics. So I took a course from him and

remarkably, I got an A, and it was a really tough course. Then he asked me to become his reader, so I could interact with Neal Houghton constantly, because I was his reader, and one day, after I took another class from him, he called me to the side—he was from Missouri, Neal D. Houghton from Missouri, and of course he mispronounced everything in Spanish—so he called me not Carlos, but he said, "Carliss?" And he had kind of a little guttural thing, "Carliss," he said to me one day, "You can't read worth a damn can you?" I said, "Sir, I'm getting As and all that, how can I not read well?" No, he said, "What you do is you spit back stuff, but you don't think about them, now let me tell you how to read. There's a beginning, a middle and an end, and that's it," and I looked at him and as if it were a golden ray of light struck my head, struck my brain, because up to then, through my freshman and sophomore years, I had been memorizing everything. I had this terrific capacity for recall, and so I was regurgitating stuff but I wasn't really thinking about them, I wasn't really turning, if you want, knowledge on its head, and so when Neal said that to me, said there's a beginning, a middle, and end, I said to myself "Oh my God, now I know how to learn," and that's how I really got interested in political science, international relations, especially interested in Latin America.

I was interested in Mexico, the revolution and so on, but in terms of US history, I had no identification with it whatsoever for a very simple reason; we weren't there, period. So 90 percent of us who went into the social sciences or into the humanities at that particular period of time in the early sixties, was in fact through Latin American studies or taking Spanish courses. That was ironic, because here we were, in the elementary schools and the junior high, with Spanish being driven out of us, and then in high school, taking Spanish, sometimes by teachers who couldn't even pronounce the language. I remember very vividly, one nun who was teaching Spanish saying, "*El cielo es azul*," pronouncing the "z" as in English and I said to myself again, "*El cielo es azul*" with the "s" sound. And so I raised my hand and I said, "Do you mean *el cielo es 'asul'*?" She says no, she says, "*azul*" with a "z" sound is the correct pronunciation of it. I thought, how can this be? I thought it ridiculous.

So I got to the university, I took a course in the humanities, and the first thing that we were to read was *Don Quixote*. So the teacher starts lecturing about Don "Quicks-ott," and "Cervantees." I said, "Excuse me, but isn't it *Don Quixote*?" Well no, we're pronouncing it in English. Really? Oh, okay. Now, the underlying message again is the language itself is either to be eradicated or to be transformed into an American English version of the word itself. Even Spanish was made into English. So a lot of us went into Latin American studies or went into Spanish, but when you went into Spanish, you had to come up against the Iberianists, who all thought that the only language that you could speak was a form of Castilian language, right? So they would pronounce everything with the Castilian pronunciation, even though half of those teachers were in fact Americans and not castellanos. They weren't Spaniards, but they all assumed this kind of affectation of Charles the Fifth of

Spain, who allegedly had a lisp, and that's why everybody had to *pronounce the Spanish "z" with a "th,"* which is itself not accurate. So, you were hit with this new version of Spanish in the Spanish Department and the only place that you had relative solace, relatively intellectual solace, was looking at Latin America. Everything else was a contradiction of what you knew to be true and what you had experienced, and the real life around you, this transborder existence that I just mentioned to you, was avoided everywhere and the only place where you saw semblances of that was in Latin American studies, and that's really how I got to political science.

01-00:34:56

Holmes:

Talk a little bit about the student body of the University of Arizona.

01-00:35:04

Vélez-Ibáñez:

There were fifty Mexicanos in the whole university when I started the University of Arizona. Fifty—five-zero. And then some of the students started creating clubs, and the first club that was created was called Los Universitarios and that's basically for Chicano students who in fact were enrolled at the University of Arizona, and it was an always an uphill fight, always an uphill fight. Nothing was about us, like in elementary school and in high school, nothing was about us at all. The only place where you could get some solace was at some of the anthropology courses that were teaching about the Southwest, but even then, they were mostly archeological, which were pre-Hispanic. You had very, very little having to do with the population of the transborder region itself.

01-00:35:56

Holmes:

Did you ever take—well, as you were just saying, I guess there was no Mexican American history classes.

01-00:36:04

Vélez-Ibáñez:

No, no, no. Are you kidding?

01-00:36:05

Holmes:

Yeah, the sixties.

01-00:36:08

Vélez-Ibáñez:

I mean, even the notion of Mexican American is a post-World War II notion, when the notion of Mexican Americans emerges, and of course that changes over time as well. The real, I think the real impact of the stuff that we later did was really in Chicano studies, in Chicana and Chicano studies, because from that emerged—from Mexican American studies really emerges this kind of notion of having this very deep critique of the place of this population north of the border.

01-00:36:43

Holmes:

Upon graduating with a degree in political science, you then went on to get a master's degree in English. Discuss that decision there, to pursue not just a master's degree but in English of all subjects.

01-00:37:02

Vélez-Ibáñez: I did that on purpose. I took a masters in English to teach English-speaking Anglos English, to make a statement, of a Mexican teaching Anglo students English. I did it on purpose and also I knew that in fact, this is one of the few areas you could get a job very quickly and very easily, and so that's why I did it, [laughter] but that, that's a long-held secret that I'm revealing now, but that's why.

01-00:37:44

Holmes: Oh, wow. What was the curriculum like in English, because English especially, when talking to those like Ramón Saldivar, you have canons and they're very Eurocentric canons that you have to go through.

01-00:38:00

Vélez-Ibáñez: Well, I had some terrific professors. There were two professors that I had, one of them was Byrd Granger. Byrd Granger had been a World War II pilot, she was just a terrific folklorist, and also Frances Gillmor. So in folklore was where you could pick up some of the knowledge about Mexicans in the Southwest and in Mexico, so I took courses from Byrd Granger as well as from Frances Gillmor, who was a great Mexicanist. Frances Gillmor wrote one of the great pieces on a Mesoamerican king. So I started getting some sense intellectually, of the connectivities between north and south, in those folklore courses by Byrd Granger and Frances Gillmor, as well by a professor by the name of Cecil Robinson, who also taught English, but he was focusing on looking at Mexicans through American literature. And as a matter of fact his first book was exactly on that. So he would take up the works of John Steinbeck and others, on how Mexicans were perceived, Willa Cather in New Mexico, and so on. So his classes were focused on the way in which American literature was looking at Mexican populations, both in Mexico and in the Southwest. So that's really how I became interested. Then I became very interested in the works of John Steinbeck, as well as—oh God, oh come on, *The Sun Also Rises*. [Ernest] Hemingway, Hemingway.

01-00:39:52

Holmes: Yes, Hemingway, of course.

01-00:30:53

Vélez-Ibáñez: So I got interested in Hemingway, especially his work on the Lost Generation. How I got to the Lost Generation, which was thirty years, forty years before me, why I got interested in the Lost Generation, because I think I felt a bit lost myself, kind of caught in between not being reinforced with selves, with the many selves of myself. So that's how I got interested in American literature. What was in American literature about us? Well, there wasn't anything except these, if you want, one dimensional kind of characterizations written by Steinbeck, of fish mongers in California, in Monterey Bay, and these guys are absolutely stupid and running around like caricatures, or Willa Cather's, *Death Comes to the Archbishop*, of a Spanish Mexican priest stereotypically having a whole bunch of children outside of wedlock and not being very good

Catholics. So you had all of these, what I would perceive as, relatively negative renditions of this population, but that's all that was available, and so I always seethed every time I read this stuff, so I knew I had to do something about it sooner or later, and I did. [laughter]

01-00:41:23

Holmes:

Well, let's talk a little bit about that, because upon earning your master's degree in English, you then joined the department, the very new Department of Mexican American Studies at San Diego State University. This was again, one of the earliest Mexican American studies departments in the US and certainly there in California. Discuss how this opportunity arose for you.

01-00:41:51

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Well, it was a two-part step. While I was taking graduate classes, I met a guy by the name of Gustavo Segade, who was a graduate student in Spanish, also a former Army officer, and we talked an awful lot about Latin American literature. He's classically trained, from New York, Puerto Rican and Cuban, beautiful Spanish, excellent. Anyway, in about 1969, I guess it was, 1970, around there, he made contact with a man by the name of Octavio Romano, who had put together some of the first literary pieces. He was from Berkeley as a matter of fact, he was an anthropologist. And so he had invited Romano—Romano was looking for manuscripts—so after Gus and I had met, he had mentioned to Romano that I was scribbling some things, and I had written a couple of short stories. So he was going around, trying to recruit writers for the first anthology of Mexican American literature, and so he ended up visiting me at Pueblo High School, where I was teaching English. I taught English at Pueblo High School for three years, or two years, I forget.

Anyway, at that time I met Octavio, I gave him a couple of manuscripts and sure enough, they appeared later on, and there's where I made a connection with Gustavo, and Gustavo left Tucson after he graduated and went to San Diego State. Later, Gustavo then asked me if I were interested in San Diego State, and I was having some problems at Pueblo High School because there had been some walkouts, and I had kind of, shall we say, went out the back door and kind of flanked the students to make sure that they were okay, and people were accusing me of leading walkouts, which I didn't, the students were the ones who did it. Anyway, so that's how I ended up at San Diego State.

At San Diego State, I put together the first bilingual systems program. It was an undergraduate program in bilinguality, and that was a kind of courses of studies and looking at language from a bilingual systems perspective, chronologically, syntactically, morphologically, that is what I had learned in English at the University of Arizona. I then kind of transformed and created bilingual classes based on Chomsky and other grammarians and linguists, of a whole course of study. I think it was twelve or eighteen units, focusing on bilingual systems, to train teachers in bilinguality, and that's kind of my

contribution to that. San Diego State was a very vibrant place, it was wonderful, the students were great, we created a whole array of programs, we got the first undergraduate degree in Mexican American studies in fact passed and approved by the state. Gustavo Segade was the first chair, he served for a year, and then I became chair of Mexican American studies for the next couple of years. But then the politics got so heavy, between the Trotskyites, the Marxists, the nationalists and you name it, you had all of these splinter groups and I said to myself, "You know what, life is too damn short, it's not worth it."

01-00:45:25

So one day, I got in my car, reflecting on what the heck I was doing there at San Diego State, and I drove north from San Diego and passed by UCSD La Jolla campus. So I got off the freeway and went into the then developing campus at UCSD and banged—by serendipity again—into the anthropology office. Now, since I was fourteen, I had been reading books having to do with anthropology, and one of the first books that I read was Thor Heyerdahl's *Kon-Tiki*, about Trans-Pacific populations, again this migratory notion. So I walked in and I met Mel Spiro, who was sitting there, he was the chair, and I looked at him and I said, "Well you know, I've always been interested in anthropology," and he says, "Why don't you apply?" Just that quick. I said, "Oh, okay, I will," and so I applied, got accepted to the graduate program. Honest to God, I had never taken a course in anthropology, never. I didn't even have to take the GRE, I didn't have to do any of that. So I was accepted to the department, I resigned from San Diego State. I had a few shekels saved up, had a couple of kids, and I got, by happenstance the following years, Ford Foundation fellowships, and so I was able then, to stay in school for the next three or four years, in the graduate program at UCSD, in anthropology, because of the Ford fellowships. Later, I did an analysis, by the way, of the impact of the Ford fellowships on the university. So that's how I got there.

01-00:47:14

Holmes:

I want to move into talking about your experience of earning your PhD in anthropology, which would of course lead to your career, bringing you back as a professor. Talk a little bit more about building the Mexican American Studies Department at San Diego State, I mean the politics that you discussed, that kind of tension is natural. We're thinking of 1969 into the early seventies, but putting the curriculum together. I know Rudy Acuña, around the same time, is building what would become the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department at Northridge; Juan Gómez-Quiñones at UCLA, and others at UCSB. Maybe discuss a little bit about putting that together.

01-00:48:13

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Juan Gómez-Quiñones was a graduate student at UCLA, but he was teaching at San Diego State. Rudy Acuña was at Northridge, as a historian, but remember he was a Sonorense, so I had contacts with Rudy because of that as well. We created shared curriculums because there was nothing there, and

there were key people. The key people putting the curriculums together were Gus Segade, specialty in literature, in the humanities, and I made some contributions to that as well. In history, Juan Gómez-Quiñones, and then someone who has never been given real credit, Dave [David] Weber. Dave Weber was one of the most brilliant historians of the Southwest and also of the Colonial Period.

Now, very little was written. As a matter of fact, Dave Weber was one of the first historians really, to generate books like *Strangers in Their Own Land* and so on and so on, and so Dave Weber is very important. Now here's what's interesting. Since nothing was written, the curriculum was based off of the actual lecture notes that we would give in class, because there was nothing written. So the lecture notes themselves, we would Xerox, and that was the basis of the—and not even Xeroxed, we had, what are these other—

01-00:49:42

Holmes:

Mimeograph.

01-00:49:43

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Mimeograph. We would mimeograph the actual lectures and distribute them out, and the same thing with all the other campuses that were starting to generate; Northridge, Sacramento State and so on, and that's really how the thing began. The other part was student participation. Students were very much involved in the development of the curriculum itself, not because of the knowledge that they had, but because these are the areas that they thought they had to know, that they didn't know anything about. And fortuitously, at the same time, you had a new dynamic emerging in which not only was there this quest for "identity," but this quest for understanding what had happened to this population over time. Why were we in the situation that we were in? Was it possible for people to do so badly in the educational process because we were all stupid, some kind of genetic reason for not being able to be accomplished in education. There had to be other reasons for it. So one of the things that we became very interested in was the sociology of education, and the anthropology of education, and the history of education. We took a look at the psychological testing regimes that were being generated and that created the curriculum, which really made us dumb, because in fact, during the fifties and the sixties and in the forties itself, there were whole generations who were treated to what I would call the dumbest down curriculum that you could find, where students in fact were shunted into shops or shunted off into home economics for girls. It was very unusual, except for the very brilliant, to in fact be able to surpass the elementary and junior high and high school compression into these classes, unless you were very brilliant.

One of the things we found really interesting, in order for you to do very well, like the average Anglo students, you had to be brilliant, and we said to ourselves wait a minute, something is wrong here, something is upside down, how can that be? So that's really the genesis, the criticism of most of our

coursework had to do with creating a different narrative, and that different narrative had to be historical, it had to be sociological, it had to be anthropological, it had to be linguistic, had to be educational. And in a sense then, the formation of Chicano studies throughout all of the institutions, really was an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary effort, which later on became so-called ethnic studies and morphed into American studies. So, because I was in English and in political science and Gus, who was in Spanish literature and Spanish linguistics, and Dave Weber, who was in history and Juan Gómez-Quiñones in history, we were able then, to pull together a kind of interdisciplinary curriculum which paid attention to complex systems, and that's really, really, besides the critical aspect, the complex systems approach really comes out of Chicano studies and Chicana studies, as well as African American studies, because African American studies did exactly the same thing.

African American studies was coming out about the same time, but they also didn't have materials. The only thing that was around for African Americans was the fact, the works that had been written by Zora Neale Hurston and a few others, and a few African Americans. At least African Americans had historians who were doing that. We didn't have hardly anybody, except one or two people from University of Texas, one maybe from the University of Arizona, and a couple from University of California, that was about it. So we had to generate that curriculum, but we generated the curriculum from what is now called a complex systems approach, and really, it came as the aftermath of students demanding a different approach to learning and a different approach to the content of that learning, and that's really how Chicano studies emerged.

01-00:54:11

Holmes:

Discuss a little bit, the reception, both among the students, but also among faculty and administrations of the new department.

01-00:54:17

Vélez-Ibáñez:

There was a great deal of support and not enough credit given to some of the administrators at San Diego State, who were many times confronted by students. There was a lot of confrontations going on, but San Diego State itself was a little different in that we were able, I think, to connect with some of the administration in a very positive way, and they provided the academic and administrative space for us and place for us. But it does come as the aftermath of very strong student involvement and student protest, no doubt about it. Chicano studies doesn't come because of somebody having a sense of noblesse oblige, but that's because people like Dave Weber, Juan Gómez-Quiñones, Gus Segade, and a bunch of students came together as a group and said enough is enough, we need to develop this area. And of course [S.I.] Hayakawa in opposition from—where was he, at Sacramento State, was Hayakawa from—



01-00:55:22

Holmes: I can't recall.

01-00:55:23

Vélez-Ibáñez: He was a great linguist, either from Sacramento State or one of the others.<sup>1</sup> He was totally opposed to anything that we were doing in this particular area, and so it was an uphill fight. It was an uphill fight, there was no doubt about it, but the fact of the matter is we were able to do things so well and we were highly organized. Remember, at the same time there's also other dynamics occurring. There's the whole, what I would call the peasant-based agricultural union movement, the UFW with Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, that's occurring at the same time, and so you have all of these dynamics emerging. You had this educational dynamic of changing the narrative, you had the UFW, of fair treatment, you had the New Mexico land grant movement occurring at the same time, you had Corky Gonzales in Colorado, pushing for a more urban kind of dynamic as well. So you had all of these occurring at the same time, as well as the African American civil rights movement.

Now, people haven't made the real connection, though, with all this—I kind of have been thinking about it. Actually, the Civil Rights Movements and the Chicano movements and the Native American movements, are connected to what Neal D. Houghton taught me much earlier, and that is the convulsive transition processes, and they were occurring globally. So Cuba was emerging, the revolutions in Nicaragua and Guatemala, and revolutionary activity in Mexico, specifically in Guerrero, in Sinaloa and so on. These were happening at the same time, and going back to Neal D. Houghton's notion of the convulsive transitions is we were going through convulsive transitions but they were global. We were one part of that and nobody's really talked about that, and the same thing with the African American movement and the Native American movement.

These are emerging at the same time that Cuba is emerging. Why do people think that Chicanos were so attracted to the Cuban Revolution? They were attracted to the Cuban Revolution not because necessarily we were all Marxist Leninist, but because they were pushing back against the oppression and repression of a population that had been pushed down for so long, and the same thing with us. It isn't that you didn't have individual mobility, but you had to be brilliant to be individually mobile, you had to be brilliant to be average in a university or for that matter from elementary through university. To be average in a friggin' university, you had to be brilliant, that's what people don't understand, and so we were tired of individual mobility being reduced to only the brilliant, everybody had to be given an equal opportunity to be brilliant. Everybody thinks the Chicano movement, the African American Movement, they were separatist movements. Yes, there was a kind of cultural nationalism involved, but the cultural nationalism was only a

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<sup>1</sup> S.I. Hayakawa worked at San Francisco State College, later known as San Francisco State University.

stepping stone to participation. We said hey, there's nothing wrong with us, you've got to take a look at yourselves and you've got to change yourselves and you've got to change the way in which we are interacting, both economically, politically and socially, and that's really what it was about.

01-00:58:52

Holmes:

Well, I wanted to follow up a little bit with the field of Chicano studies beginning to take shape. Juan Gómez-Quiñones, Jesus Chavarria at UCSB, Rudy Acuña, and others, in April of 1969, you have the El Plan de Santa Bárbara. Were you aware that this was going on?

01-00:59:17

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Yes.

01-00:59:18

Holmes:

Did you attend?

01-00:59:19

Vélez-Ibáñez:

No, I didn't attend. I was taking care of curriculum. [laughter]

01-00:59:25

Holmes:

A lot of people look at that, the El Plan de Santa Bárbara, that gathering at Santa Barbara in April of 1969, many look at it as kind of the jumpstart, the beginning of Chicano studies. Others actually point to that, you know with the EOP programs, that the curriculum was already being made, that universities were always going forward. What are your observations, not really in just the debate, but just your thoughts and observations on the Plan, the public gathering about the need to create this field.

01-01:00:07

Vélez-Ibáñez:

I think it was a very important event as a political statement of a common effort. We were already doing this before the Plan de Santa Bárbara. It created a dynamic to continue the development of Chicano and Mexican American studies. It wasn't the keystone rationale, we were already doing it, but it did in fact unite us with a gestalt. Some of us may have thought, "Eh, it's kind of rudimentary, a slant, come on, it's another mythological position"—I mean for those of us who were kind of hardcore materialists, we kind of said, "Well, yeah, we'll go with it, but it's another myth creation." So there were many of us, however, who kept our mouths shut, and we kept our mouths shut because what was more important was the dynamic that was being created. That dynamic was in fact furthered the shift in the narrative that was imperative, in the university. The university had to shift their narratives and sometimes we failed, sometimes we succeeded, but for the most part we succeeded in creating the development of Chicano studies and Chicana studies, which itself had, by the way some limitations. It was very male-oriented, it was very male-oriented, there's no doubt about it, and it wasn't until women like Enriqueta Vazquez at San Diego State or Antonia Hernandez and other women say, "Hey wait a minute you know what, you're not telling this whole story, you're only telling the male part of this," and they were absolutely correct. So,

Chicano studies had to have its own comeuppance of Chicano studies as well, so we had Chicana and Chicano studies.

Now people are experimenting with "Latinx." Well, I have a problem with Latinx in and of itself, because here we have, I mean it's bad enough that you get typed with being Hispanics by the Census Bureau during one of the presidential regimes, but now you're Latinx, what the heck that does that mean? I understand the underlying gestalt for its emergence, but Latinx for me is again, homogenizing the population as if you know, this very heterogeneous population is not monolithic, it cannot be defended statistically with such an erasing term, because you have to disaggregate the populations in order to make good policy. So if you clump everybody together as Latinx, the only thing you're doing is reducing the population to a kind of homogeneous gestalt, which I resist. It's not a matter of a cultural resistance but for me, it's a matter of a statistical difference with the notion of Latinx. Latinx is going to be crossed out again, I mean it took us a whole lot of years to create Chicana and Chicano studies, and transborder studies, and recognize the ecological, if you want, grounding for this population and for these populations.

01-01:03:35

Holmes:

You talked a little bit about the Chicano movement and various kind of civil rights movements that were going on during this time. The movement, as you well pointed out, obviously was a foundation and a very important influence for the field itself. How did you see the facets of this movement and facets of social activism influence the development of Chicano studies?

01-01:04:10

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Oh, it was a necessary condition. It wasn't then, it isn't now, just another intellectual exercise, because you see if we only do what we do, whether it's Chicano studies or anthropology or sociology or whatever it may be, in order to put books up on the shelf, then we're failing the populations with whom we're working. It's got to mean something other than for yourself, which is a highly individualistic, very academic, very scholarly position. One of the great contradictions of the academy is that it pretends in fact, to provide the basis for social and cultural change, and that's why you have new institutions being created within universities that try to serve that. So, for example, here at this university we have the School of Social Transformation, and within that there are a number of associated programs that do have, in fact, a focus on development of programs and projects that serve and enhance the broader community. So, Chicana and Chicano studies has always had that aspect. At San Diego State, we put together, for example, the Chicano Barrio Station in San Diego, and that was in fact to create a dynamic of educational opportunity in the neighborhood itself, in downtown San Diego. And the Barrio Station serves and continues to serve, even to this day, a whole array of new populations that are coming in, new undocumented populations in very serious and very positive ways. So "criticism" isn't sufficient, otherwise it becomes a kind of ego satisfying kind of process where you say, "Everything

is hunky-dory, I did mine now." Bull. This is why here in this particular school [School of Transborder Studies at ASU], we have programs that in fact are very important for the community. We're very much involved for example, with Dreamers and numerous other programs. We have to have a functional knowledge base and for these new narratives that we've created, to mean something to others than to ourselves as academics, because it's too easy to become just a shelf-borne academic. So underlying Chicano studies, the dynamic of Chicano studies, and its emergence and flowering from those historical conditions were imperative fuels to continue Chicano studies to other than just being another academic program, which in some cases that's exactly what it's become.

01-01:06:50

Holmes:

How did the activism during that time, impact you personally and politically?

01-01:06:59

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Personally, it gave me a sense of what had to be done, of what we didn't have, of what we hadn't been thinking about, and also a realization that I didn't know all that much, that I needed to know more in order to be able to integrate a knowledge base that I had rudimentarily developed during this whole process of developing the curriculum and learning from Juan Gómez-Quiñones and from Dave Weber and from so many others. But it wasn't enough for me, so that's why I went into anthropology. I went into anthropology because I saw in anthropology, which is a very funny kind of colonialist regime in and of itself by the way, its history of the utilization in Africa and all over the place, as a mechanism for the colonialists was intriguing to me, how they did it. Maybe that's part of why I went into anthropology, but anthropology in Mexico is very different and that's why in fact, I studied in Mexico as well, and that kind of balanced the kind of psychological anthropology and archeology that I learned at UCSD, with Mexican anthropology. Again, it's this whole transborder process. The American anthropology training, although deliciously wonderful theoretically, learning from people like Mel Spiro and Freddy Bailey, and the whole Manchester school from England and all these people. That was balanced by the materialist Mexican anthropology from Angel Palerm and many others from Mexico, and at the museum, that was balanced, that gave me really, a transborder perspective of anthropology. And that for me has been some of the methodology and techniques picked up at UCSD, the political ecology of Mexican anthropology combined together, where I really generated a relatively high order of methodological techniques and technical capacities. They co-joined to influence the way in which I developed the school as well, and my understanding of complex systems.

01-01:09:30

Holmes:

Well, let's turn now to your graduate years at UCSD. You already mentioned your reason for leaving the Mexican American Studies Department there at San Diego State, but maybe touch on again, what really drew you to anthropology. You were just discussing some of that and that you were

already reading anthropology, early works, you know by the age of fourteen. Was there a certain area, you know, that you wanted to focus on?

01-01:10:01

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes.

01-01:10:02

Holmes: Was it that transborder region?

01-01:10:02

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes and yes. I wanted to think about the connectivities between south and north, and north and south. I was already thinking about that because of my own experience, but I didn't know how to place them theoretically and methodologically. I didn't know how to make those connections. At the mythic level you could understand it and I mean reference to Aztlán and all that, that's at the mythic level, but I needed a deeper level of technological knowledge, of material knowledge of that connectivity, how was that possible over time, over thousands of years. So that's one of the reasons I went into anthropology, but UCSD, frankly didn't have any of that at all, they were mostly Africanist, but because they were Africanist, they knew and understood and really shared, how the colonial process worked, because a lot of those professors were from the inside looking at that, and the people especially for the Manchester school from England had experienced colonial processes after WWII. Some of these people were structural functionalists in anthropology, and that comes out of [Alfred] Radcliffe-Brown in anthropology, who himself was a colonial officer in Africa. So I got really, a firsthand dose of this, but the other very important part of my training in anthropology at UCSD was in psychological anthropology, which was a very functionalist approach but led me to fundamentally understand really deep underlying patterns of human behavior that was learned and changed over time, and how to approach it theoretically.

So that's what I got from anthropology. From anthropology as well I really got deep technical methodological understanding and learning, especially including the use of statistics and survey techniques systemically, but also this kind of deep psychological anthropology of looking at humans, at personalities as these very complex systems, and then to fundamentally understand that your job wasn't in fact to approach human behavior from the point of view of how is uniformity replicated, but rather how is culture distributed. Now that is a barnburner, because you're not looking for sameness, you're looking for differences, you're looking for not replication but you're looking for distribution, and for distributional analysis, so that you better have your methodology and techniques well honed. But you see, this is directly connected to the Mexican narrative of heterogeneity. How you treat the heterogeneity of the experiences of these populations, including intermarriage, I might point out. Up to 1888, 25 percent of intermarriages, of all marriages in the state of Arizona, were between Mexicans and Anglos. So there we always had this high intermarriage rate mostly between Mexican

women and Anglo men and what's interesting about that is what about the progeny, how do the progeny turn out? So that's part of the heterogeneity. So, to treat this population, you had to have this distributional notion. This is why Latinx bothers me so much, because in fact, they're assuming homogeneity again and you can't defend it. So what I learned from anthropology was this distributional model of human behavior, rather than from a replicatory model. Some things people hang on to for very good reasons, but that's always in relationship to something else. So I learned very early on that really, what's most important locally is actually extra-local in origin. So that gave me, anthropologically, theoretically, a very different gestalt on how to understand this narrative connectivity between south and north.

01-01:14:29

Holmes:

That's really interesting. How was the environment? If we take a look at San Diego and then look at Tucson, I mean both could be categorized obviously, as border cities, right?

01-01:14:43

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Yes.

01-01:14:41

Holmes:

You know? You're within that borderlands region. How was that environment, both academic and socially, for you?

01-01:14:52

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Well, the graduate program itself was small, it was a small program, and it did focus on political anthropology, which was a positive one, but also psychological anthropology, and that's why I had to go to Mexico to get more training. The faculty itself was really interesting, because of Theodore "Schwartz," not "Swartz," because Swartz was an Africanis professor and one of my mentors as well. Schwartz was a student of Margaret Mead, and he had worked in New Guinea himself, and so he was somewhat influenced by the Margaret Mead cultural anthropology approach, but from a kind of personal perspective. There was always this interaction between us, a constant interaction, in which learning was the utmost rationale for your engagement, not some kind of authority trip. That's one thing about UCSD at that particular point in time, you didn't have this authority, repressive kind of dynamic. It was very engaging, it was very equal, and of course some of them were interesting and different, I mean anthropology itself selects pretty quirky personalities many times and UCSD was no different.

We had a psychiatrist who was also an anthropologist, who taught us psychological anthropology. A seminar I remember vividly, and he wouldn't allow us to sit on his couch, because he wanted a seminar at his home, rather than having it at school. So he wouldn't allow us to sit on his couch, but he insisted we had to sit on the floor, and one of the exercises that we had to do was that we had a client that each of us interviewed for the whole semester, and then we would present our interview and our penetrating questions to the

rest of the seminar. So we would listen to our interaction between ourselves and our client, and then we would make remarks about it. Well we decided to liven things up a bit to enhance our interpretations, by ingesting beverages and cannabis before the seminar. So we would share, for example, bonges of all sorts, and consume allotments of beer before we had the seminar. So when we had the seminar and we listened to the interviews, we made these enormous leaps of faith in the commentaries because we were all, most of us were influenced in one way or another. The professor was quite impressed because of the insights that we provided to the interviews. So that was part of the experience of UCSD in fact, that we were pretty rambunctious as a set of graduate students, and the professors basically barely would rein us in, because they knew that this crazy bunch of anthropologists to be highly motivated not only to be first rate anthropologists but, to use the basic statement from *Gone with the Wind*, frankly my dear, I don't give a damn of what you think of me, I'm going to learn anyway. So that group was really a special group and most of them became pretty good anthropologists, successful anthropologists. One of the things that I learned is that you could learn and teach and develop without oppression.

01-01:18:56

Holmes:

Which would seem that that's a much more inviting environment for a Chicano scholar, than what you experienced in Arizona.

01-01:19:08

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Oh yes, absolutely, oh absolutely, I wouldn't have done it any other way and if I had had to have gone to the usual, traditional anthropology department, I wouldn't have survived for more than a month. [laughter] Yes.

01-01:19:19

Holmes:

Let's talk a little bit about your early scholarship. You mentioned some short stories that you were writing, that Octavio Romano wanted to put in an edited edition, *El Espejo*.

01-01:19:38

Vélez-Ibáñez:

*El Espejo*, yes, *The Mirror*.

01-01:19:40

Holmes:

Two of your pieces, *The Raid*, as well as *So Farewell Hope and With Hope, Farewell Fear*. You mentioned how that relationship kind of developed, but discuss those pieces. These were some of the writings you were doing in your masters work in English?

01-01:20:03

Vélez-Ibáñez:

No.

01-01:20:04

Holmes:

Just on your own?

01-01:20:05

Vélez-Ibáñez:

On my own.

01-01:20:06

Holmes: And were these short stories?

01-01:20:08

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes, they were short stories. *The Raid* really comes as the aftermath of the stories taught and talked about in my house by my mother, because she went through the revolution and all of the events that occurred in that particular short story really occurred to her and to her family. That was part of my grounding if you want, my political grounding, was in revolution, but both of the tragedy as well as the hope, because my mother would always make a commentary that the revolution there was necessary, even though she hated it because it killed her father and because of the bloodletting in her mother's courtyard, of young men. But there was also a mystical part to that, that that particular story brought in, and it was in a sense a Catholic tale of the way in which there was a kind of divine intervention to the avoidance of the kidnapping of her older sister by one of the revolutionaries. So that kind of blends the Catholicism of my household with the revolutionary knowledge that my mother brought into the household itself, so that's really where *The Raid* as a short story came from. These are the unknown narratives missing from this country and encapsulates us as if we had no history.

And then the other one, *So Farewell Hope and with Hope, Farewell Fear*, really comes out of a line from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in which after all of the angels had been set forth into hades by God, after the fight between Satan and God, and they're all waking up from having been thrown down into hades. Beelzebub wakes up and he says "Oh, it's terrible, I'll never be able to see the gold avenues of heaven again and all the gold trinkets and all the rest of it," and Satan is just waking up as well, and his wings are just emerging and he looks over to Beelzebub and he says "Don't despair," he says, "Because with hope, so farewell fear," that is the fear of going back into heaven, you don't have to be afraid of that any more. So with hope, farewell, fear.

01-01:23:00

Holmes: I see.

01-01:23:01

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes. Fear of going back into heaven. So, reconcile yourself the fact that you are in Hades now. And that then sloughs over as well, into that particular short story of this guy coming back from Vietnam and having gone through Vietnam and trying to get himself back together again because he's suffering terribly from physical and psychological wounds, but the psychological wounds predate his having gone into the Marine Corps and going into Vietnam. He tells about his time in boot camp, where people are getting hit, screamed at and so on, but he's not giving in. So this guy comes back from Vietnam after being wounded and going through all the stress and he's on this road, he doesn't know exactly where he's going until he sees this irrigation water, water rushing, cascading from an irrigation pipe, and he looks down into the trough where the water is bubbling up and he sees himself, but the



image obviously is distorted because of the trough, but in fact this distorted water really shows him clarified, it's his own distortion. He sees himself and he's just about to pull out this .45 caliber automatic from his haversack, because he's been wounded, he was hit in the right shoulder and also blew out one of the kneecaps, and he's about to shoot himself when he sees little kids tumbling down from a hillside and they're playing there while their folks are working in the fields, and so he changes his mind and he goes towards them and he very superficially starts reconnecting himself, both psychically and physically, to these what I call stumbling stoops I think, and so he doesn't kill himself, and so he continues on this road to find himself. Actually, that short story is part of a novel and the novel is in twelve months, it's a cycle, where he gets picked up by an Indigenous family and he gets in the pickup in the back with two elderly aunts and a grandmother and children, and he sits there with them, and in the front, the husband and grandfather are driving the truck to Tucson, between Marana and Tucson, and it's there, with this Indigenous family that he starts reconnecting his humanity with them, and that's really where the short story comes from.

01-01:26:26

Holmes:

Oh, that's nice.

01-01:26:27

Vélez-Ibáñez:

And then he goes into Mexico, goes all the way around, all the way to Chiapas, and from Chiapas, all the way through Veracruz way up to the north, and then comes back from Chihuahua, and goes back into Tucson. So it's this cycle of self-discovery if you will, and also reconnecting self to this world, to this normal world, because he's been somewhere else.

01-01:27:01

Holmes:

I wanted to talk about what might have been one of your first published social science pieces, *The Aged and the Political Process: An Anthropological Analysis of the Spanish Speaking Elderly in the United States*. This was published by the Institute of Aging. Discuss the genesis of this work.

01-01:27:25

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Yes, that's kind of strange. There was a fellowship, a graduate fellowship at the School of Gerontology at USC, and I was looking around for further funds to continue my research, to actually conduct my research in Mexico. I had always been interested in the aging and the aging process and that sort of thing, so the School of Gerontology had these fellowships, these year-long fellowships, where they would pay for your research, for everything, and that's where I first met Barbara Myerhoff, who was a great anthropologist, and Sally Falk Moore, also another anthropologist, and they had this big gerontology project, NSF funded project, and so I applied for it and got accepted and went to the interviews at USC at that time and got through the interviews. Another friend of mine, Jose Cuellar also was interviewing at the same time, so they said "Well you know, you have the funding now for your project," and then now Jose, who is going to be doing some really important

stuff with elderly people in Los Angeles got turned down. Jose came out after his interview he says, "I didn't get it," and I said "Oh, wait a minute, why don't we figure something out." So we both went back in and I said look, why don't you split the fellowship between us, because I'm not going to spend that much money doing my field work in Mexico and he needs it for East LA. So that's how we did it and Jose went to East LA and I went to Mexico, and that's really what that project was about, was to fund our research, and that's why I did it. Jose and I have remained friends for 50 years.

01-01:29:23

Holmes:

Let's talk about your dissertation and the two books that actually would come out of that. You conducted fieldwork in Mexico, in the city of Neza.

01-01:29:36

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Nezahualcoyotl, which means the place where hungry coyote resides, that's what it was called.

01-01:29:44

Holmes:

And this, if my research is correct, this is the fourth largest city in Mexico.

01-01:29:50

Vélez-Ibáñez:

It is now, it is now. Then it had 550,000 people, with an increase of 10,000 people per month, in a sixty-two square kilometer area with a density of population of 17,000 people per square kilometer.

01-01:30:05

Holmes:

Wow.

01-01:30:06

Vélez-Ibáñez:

There was a death rate in some of the colonialias, for children between the ages of zero and four, of 75 percent. See, that's why you need the stats, otherwise you can't do the work. But that was part of the connectivity as well, because I was interested in migration, again, getting back to this transborder experience. I was interested in migration at that particular period in time, and why people were migrating and why they were getting there. But there were a couple of things that were interesting. Because I was trained in political anthropology, I was trained in the politics, you know of all of this, but political anthropology doesn't mean that you just study politics. You study how it is that people struggle in contexts in which they find themselves at a great disadvantage, because kind of underlying all of my work are two basic questions that I'll always have, and that is: how are people able to survive which shouldn't be able to; and how do people excel when they shouldn't be able to. So those two kinds of notions have always driven my work and that's what drove my work on Nezahualcoyotl, those two basic questions. The way they did it was in fact to generate a lot of political activities, in order to both protect, as well as to make possible, their living space in Nezahualcoyotl, because in Nezahualcoyotl, half of it was developed by invasions and the other half by illegal land developers. So some of these lots were sold up to

sixteen times each, so you had a great deal of conflict, so I really got interested in that.

What I became even more interested in, is how were people able to develop their families and their kinship networks and make livable a space and place in which you had those kinds of characteristics that I just mentioned. How did you do it, that's really the genesis of my interest in households and the way in which households connect with each other and how women use their networks in order to—for example, if a land developer came in with police to bounce people out of their houses, the women would send their children to other houses, to announce to other women to meet at a particular point in time at that household. So the women would surround the household, the women and the kids would be placed, by the house itself, and then they would prevent the land developers and police from evicting those who lived in the home. Some of these women were experts in the use of slingshots and using poles, and they would actually physically attack some of the police using slingshots.

01-01:33:00

Holmes:

Wow. A lot of scholars, both in anthropology as well as in history, particularly in the first generation of Chicano scholars, their scholarship is close to home for them, right, to understanding various dynamics of their own experience and their own communities. Many of these works sometimes include community studies of their home community. How did you select Neza as your field site?

01-01:33:39

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Serendipity again, serendipity or a great cosmic convergence, either of the two rationales will do. I was attending a seminar, a Chicano studies history seminar in Mexico City, funded by the humanities people in Washington, through [Jesus] Chavarria, by the way. And so they invited a bunch of Chicano scholars and went to Mexico City to study history and other topics, and there was a guerilla theater group—the Mascarones—that gave a performance at the Colegio de Mexico in Mexico City, which we all attended. I started talking to some of the actors about their work, why they did it and all that, and then one of them says, "You know, you talk funny," to me. He says, "You talk just like the people in Nezahualcoyotl talk." Now either he was referring to my northern Mexican Spanish or he was referring to my working-class Spanish, I don't know which it was and I really didn't give a damn my dear. He says, "You should come out and visit and look at some of our performances." So the next time they went to Nezahualcoyotl from Mexico City, I went with them and sure enough, they performed. But I noticed there were other things that were going on, that they hadn't noticed. One of the things that people had been writing on the walls, *Viva Zapata*, and other slogans against land developers and local government. I said ah, political anthropology, something is happening here, and so I stayed there. For that summer then, for most of that summer for that period that we were there, I started conducting fieldwork, and that's how I got interested in

Nezahualcoyotl. Then I came back the following year and did the same thing and then I stayed there for a year after that and I had intermittent field visits, all over a period of about three years. So that's really how I got to Nezahualcoyotl, but what I learned there was way the heck beyond what I had ever imagined.

One of the things that I learned very early on, getting back to this business of doing work with populations that are like you or not like you, or the insider/outsider idea, was that as an anthropologist and also as a temporary person there, is that you're given an identity. People there, a lot of these folks said well, we can't quite figure you out, "You're an imitation American and a replica of a Mexican." So again, there was this transborder identity, right, and of course I thought it was hilarious that in fact they had that insight, that I was there in them, but I was not of them, and that this puts me in this kind of marginal position, which you need as an anthropologist but you will always more than likely be given an identity by the community over time.

The second aspect was that I really came to understand fully, was the importance of the density of relationships and how these worked not just socially and culturally, but also economically. That's where the second book comes out, a version of that in the third book, these rotating savings and credit associations which people distributed basically money over a period of time and they used it for different reasons besides the politics. So of course, it was very important for those two things but there's a third one, and the third one is that many of the person who were in Nezahualcoyotl had migrated from Oaxaca to Nezahualcoyotl, but they themselves had been braceros in California, and in California, some of them had joined Cesar Chavez's union at the same time that I was in fact participating in all these activities. So here you have this connectivity of Oaxacaqueños in California, going back to Oaxaca, and in Oaxaca, going from Oaxaca to Nezahualcoyotl. Again, this is connectivity and I said to myself "Oh, shoot, I've got to get my theoretical ducks in order here, I've got to start thinking differently about these processes, and that's really, that's what for me became the foundation, for an awful lot of my work later on.

01-01:38:23

Holmes:

Let's talk about one of the books that came out of that, which I believe is your—this might have been based off the dissertation, *Rituals of Marginality: Politics, Process and Cultural Change in Central Urban Mexico*. This was your ethnographic study of Neza. It's interesting, as a historian you do archival research and the narrative begins to flesh out, yet here, you have so many complexities to sink your teeth into intellectually. How did you decide to what to focus on for that first book, the type of analysis and discussions from your fieldwork?

01-01:39:14

Vélez-Ibáñez: The best way I can explain that is by using the metaphor of a cornucopia. The cornucopia has this huge entrance right, and then what you do is you narrow it down. So the way which I treat all the work that I do, is I use the cornucopia image. The cornucopia image, the only way in which you can get the circumference of the largest part of the cornucopia is statistically and demographically, going back to the training again. So the first thing that I did, although I got interested at that initial summer, I had to do much greater work than that, and so the cornucopia included questions like what are the populations like, how are they distributed, what does the stratification look like, but more importantly, why are they there, how come? Well in order to understand that, I had to understand the political policies that were generated during the 1970s, to push people from Oaxaca into this area, and from Mexico City itself, from some of the proletarian urban communities in Mexico City, pushed out of Mexico City into Nezahualcoyotl, and from Oaxaca, Chiapas, Veracruz, you name it, into Nezahualcoyotl. How come? You had rural migrants going in, how come?

Well, the how come comes from the policies that were created, of underfunding agricultural support and the rise in property costs in the urban area, because of changes in policy of what they call industrial substitution. Instead of importing industrial products, you create the industrial base in Mexico City, especially around Mexico City, which replaces the importance of importation for export, and so that raised property prices in the urban area, underfunded the rural areas, and that's what pushed the two populations into Nezahualcoyotl. In order to understand that, you've got to understand the policy of the government itself over time, and that's where the cornucopia comes in. And then you look at the demographics, the specific demographics of that population, and then from that, then further you reduce, why are people then participating in all these political protests, but then how is that organized other than just from an institutional organizational sense, but how are they really organized and supported. The way in which they were organized and supported was through families and so therefore, you had to get into the families. Obviously, a population of five hundred fifty thousand, I couldn't do all of that, so I initially, through another way, got a random sample of twelve hundred families, households, and that's where the statistical information for the book emerges out of. But that allowed me then to further narrow down my observational anthropological participation to a much narrower mirror or lens, and that's how.

01-01:42:40

Holmes: Well, it was also serendipitous in some respects, as you describe in the book, that politically at this time in Neza, there was also Arturo Valenzuela Cisneros, who was leading a reform movement, which overwhelmingly included women.

01-01:43:03

Vélez-Ibáñez: Oh yeah.

01-01:43:04

Holmes: Discuss that a little bit.

01-01:43:05

Vélez-Ibáñez: Well, you see all of the literature up to that time, including some of the great literature of urban areas, especially in political science, never mentioned women, never, and yet when I saw all these women surrounding these lots and participating in activities and going on marches, I said wait a minute, something is wrong here. Not only that, I knew darn well, from the Chicanas in San Diego, Sacramento and all over the place, in Tucson, wherever, you know Mexican women were out there on picket lines, and so on and so on, I asked, why are academics avoiding them? And the reason for it is that in one of the endnotes of one of the scholars who was doing work in that same area was that the reason he didn't include women in his sample was because Mexican women didn't participate in political activities. Well, I said to myself, either you weren't there or you have such great blinders that you couldn't see. So for me, it became very obvious that in fact women were running all of the politics during the day while men were working outside, and so on, and when they returned, they would take over the political activities of the time, and then women would go home and take care of the kids or whatever it is in the evenings, but they ran everything else during the day. So you really had a male/female movement but unrecognized, even by Arturo. Arturo thought it was just him and all of these other guys. Well, the fact, what was pushing them in fact were the women, to participate, to protest and so on, and that to me was very obvious, but it was very obvious I guess in part because of my own family, but also because of the women in San Diego State. It was just not true that women merely were passively living out their domestic lives. And then my obvious observations in Nezahualcoyotl, of the women confronting, defending, and leading simply confirmed what I knew to be true.

01-01:45:03

Holmes: You also interrogate the use and misuse of marginality theory, which is very interesting that there's friends of mine coming out in 2011, with PhDs, who are still using marginality theory—

01-01:45:23

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yeah, I know.

01-01:45:24

Holmes: Discuss how this theory fit but also didn't fit, or how your thinking began to change around this theory from your fieldwork.

01-01:45:33

Vélez-Ibáñez: It began with a Chicano movement, because in fact Mexicans of the Southwest, north of the border, have always been looked upon as marginal populations, and like I told you, we knew this not to be true. So even that notion of marginality, if you want a nice fancy term, from a quotidian basis, which just means daily, God bless it, that's all it means, but you've got to jazz it up with all this stuff, that it was very obvious that we weren't marginal. It's

impossible to be marginalized, but it's highly possible to be exploited and to be placed in a structural place where you are differentially treated. So the notion of marginality, from my particular point of view, was a very bourgeois kind of rationalization for exploitation: it's their fault, they're marginal, they're marginalized, and not only that, the culture of poverty stuff emerges right—it's a continuous argument of that sort. That is, the people have learned a culture by which they themselves create their own marginality. Well no, they're placed in a position where the notion of integration in itself is a problem as well. Capitalism doesn't work upon some notion of integration, capitalism scrapes value that's what it does, that's how it works, what it's supposed to do, right? But the distribution of the earnings of that are never equal, so you're going to have inequality as a standard of capitalism, so the notion of marginality in and of itself, takes us away from looking at the material basis of stratification in equality, to a rationale of normalcy, and I refute that. So, the rituals of marginality in fact are played out in national exhibitions of that, with the flag and with the celebration of the revolution, with the celebration of la Virgen de Guadalupe and all the rest of it, these are all rituals that enhance and reinforce the position with the state and its rationale under this kind of material economic structure of inequality.

01-01:48:18

Holmes:

Discuss how—because I found that argument not just very convincing, but also when we look at the ethnography, just the beautiful writing and discussions of it, that you get the sense of this, right, from your descriptions and analysis. Within the field, how was the reception of this work?

01-01:48:44

Vélez-Ibáñez:

It was very positive, by anthropologists who had kind of seen the light of all of this. You had people like Richard Adams from Texas, who was very helpful, Eric Wolf, he did all the preface to the economic stuff that I did, and Richard Adams did the preface to the *Nezahualcoyotl* book, and people like Bob Kemper at Dallas, they were all—it was very well received, and of course the commies really received it well, people in the [laughter] more Marxist oriented areas received it very well but in general, it was timely. It was timely, especially and not surprisingly, a lot of the women feminists were very supportive of that book, because in fact it's one of the few books, other than those written by some women, who in fact provided an insight into the courage and bravery and sheer doggedness of women in these contexts. So it was well received, yeah.

01-01:50:07

Holmes:

Well, let's move to a book that came out the same year, your second book, *Bonds of Mutual Trust: The Cultural Systems of Rotating Credit Associations*.

01-01:50:16

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Terrribly written. It's probably one of the most boringly written books ever written on the face of the earth, yeah. It was a highly functionalist book and I shouldn't have written it that way but I did.

01-01:50:27

Holmes: Now this work also arose from your fieldwork?

01-01:50:32

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes, but I expanded it, I went way, way beyond. I have to tell you a little story and the story is twofold. First of all, I learned about the *tandas*, or *cundinas*, just by again, serendipity, but not really serendipity because fieldwork does this for you: it gives you information that you didn't know anything about before, and that is in conversation with a guy whose house I was living in. He asked me for a hundred pesos, he says, "Can you lend me a hundred pesos?" I said, "Yeah, what do you need it for?" He says, "It's for the *tanda*," I said, "What's a *tanda*?" So then he explained it to me, how it worked, all the rest, and that's how I got interested in it, because in fact this is one of the featured mechanisms by which families are able to answer the first question: how are you able to survive when you shouldn't have been able to? That was a key, that was a key for me. But then I found in fact, that these things existed all the way from Chiapas, all the way to Washington State, and so that's how I got interested in that issue.

The second part of the story has to do with my initial introduction into UCLA, where I was a faculty member, and the guy who recruited me to UCLA was not the Department of Anthropology; really, it was Juan Gómez-Quiñones. Juan Gómez-Quiñones was the director of the Chicano Studies Research Center, and he was able to generate, or to acquire some FTEs, some teaching positions in different departments, and so what he did was he told basically, the Department of Anthropology, he says look, I've got this FTE to be fulfilled by someone who is of Chicano or Mexican origin, will you take a look at this guy? Me. So, I went through the review, you know to the interview and all that, and so I was hired at UCLA. And then one day the chair of the department, right after I had gotten there, about three weeks after that. I was in my little office, because at UCLA, in Haines Hall, the third floor, offices then, and I think they're still divided according to rank, so the smallest offices always belonged to the assistant professors, who were all shoveled off to one side, and all the silverback males, most of them males, were on the other side with these great big offices, many of them had a kitchen and even a balcony, I mean they were really first rate.

Anyway, so my door was open, and the then chair, a guy by the name of Wendell Oswalt, who was an Arctic archeologist—now you can't get any tougher birds than an Arctic archeologist, I mean you can't, because these guys are out there in the boonies, you know really suffering, freezing to death, losing toes and all sorts of stuff. So he came in one day, about three weeks after I got there and he says, the first thing he says, "Boy—" [laughter] You know, here I am, you know a former Marine, having gone through many uneasinesses, the Chicano movement and all that, to being called boy. So I said well, I can either whack this guy down and lose the job or I can just keep my mouth shut and just listen to what he has to say. So he says boy, he says,



"There are two things you're going to have to do if you're going to stick around here." I said okay. He says, "One is you need to publish your dissertation into a book and then you need to publish another book that has nothing to do with your dissertation, and then you need to publish at least an article a year by the time you come up for tenure." And he said, "That's the first time and the last time I want to talk to you," and then he turned around and walked away. [laughter] And you know what, very frankly, that was the best advice I ever got, because that's exactly what I did. So the Nezahualcoyotl book is a transformation of the dissertation into the book and the book, *The Bonds of Mutual Trust*, is the second book that has little to do with the original fieldwork. That's the backstory of that.

01-01:54:40

Holmes:

But it was the fieldwork where you came into at least understanding the existence of these credit associations.

01-01:54:44

Vélez-Ibáñez:

That's right. And the fortuitous existence also, of one of my graduate students by the name of Camilo Garcia Parra, who was an undocumented graduate student who eventually finished two PhDs, one in psychology and one in anthropology, and now is a very prominent scholar at the University of Veracruz.

01-01:55:09

Holmes:

It's interesting, because if you look at the research and methodology in this, outside your critiques of your own writing, you looked at seventeen cities, I think in Mexico and the United States, involved four thousand people, ninety of these credit association. The tandas, that you described so well, it's a survival strategy, and that these are actually found in various places in the Global South, as you know when you're an economically marginal population, this is the way that you survive? I think that you even mentioned that the reader gets the sense that these communities could not really go to a bank, especially during this time, to get a loan, and so this was the one way that you pooled resources as a community.

01-01:55:59

Vélez-Ibáñez:

And still to this day, I mean right now there are these *tandas* right here at this university.

01-01:56:04

Holmes:

Interesting.

01-01:56:06

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Oh yeah, they're all over the place, but see, there's an underlying message to this thing. And this is where the training in psychology and psychological anthropology is very important. The underlying message is that these folks are demanding of themselves, not to spend. In other words, they're delaying gratification. Now the narrative of Mexicans, north and south, are these happy-go-lucky drunken folks who spend all of their time and all of their

money in having parties. Even Octavio Paz, the great Mexican philosopher who writes about the labyrinth of solitude and all of the rest of that, focuses on the fact that Mexicans cannot delay gratification. And I see this, here you have people waiting months many times, weeks many times, for their share of the contributions. Now if that is not a delay of gratification, I don't know what the hell it is, and not only are they delaying gratification of the amount that they are going to be receiving, but they're delaying gratification until that time that they have figured out strategically, where they want to spend the money. So you're looking at a population that not only is delaying gratification, but is strategically considering where they're going to spend their money and why. So it may very well be to buy a box of Kleenex at wholesale price and sell it retail and make more money, or it may be, because in fact they want to utilize that money for a ritual activity that's important to them, such as a baptism or a wedding or whatever it may be, or a birthday of a child.

So those two psychological aspects of delaying gratification and strategically figuring out where it is that they want to utilize and how they want to use their money, counters this whole stereotypic assumption and premise of Mexicans as these carefree, party going—and although Mexicans do party, that Mexicans are carefree in another kind of way that people really don't understand, but I'll get to that maybe later, goes against this narrative. So it's not just a matter of survival and achievement, but it's a matter of shifting and turning their narrative around, of understanding the population then and the population now. A substantial part of that population, of the 6.2 million undocumented Mexicans that are in this country, not 11 million, 6.2 million, half of whom by the way, are here as undocumented people because of overstayed visas, not because they crossed the border, or about half of one percent of the total American population. They're going to put walls up for half of one percent of the population, who really cross the border illegally. I would say that the great majority of them participating in those *tandas* and *cundinas* right now, right here in Phoenix, all around here, and they're delaying gratification and they're strategically figuring out where they're going to invest their money.

01-02:00:02

Holmes:

What I also found interesting is one of the findings and contributions outside reshaping that narrative, was this kind of cultural code of mutual trust and the role of women in the learning, of learning.

01-02:00:17

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Absolutely. Ninety percent of these *tandas* and *cundinas* are in the hands of women, and that's because of the social relationships between women and the density of those relationships between them, and they're cross-border and transborder, as I've pointed out to you as well, and the book points out, and these cross class.

01-02:00:39

Holmes: What's also interesting too here, to finish up is, and I could be wrong on this, but that book, when it came out, is really one of the first kind of transnational, transborder studies connecting populations on either side of the border.

01-02:00:55

Vélez-Ibáñez: Materially, yes. And that's what I had been looking for, that I couldn't get in English, that I couldn't get in literature, because I didn't have the techniques and methodology. I didn't have the methodology and techniques and the theoretical understandings of all of that.

01-02:01:11

Holmes: And then to cap this work, Eric Wolf wrote the forward. You know?

01-02:01:19

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yeah.

01-02:01:21

Holmes: Discuss that briefly. What did that mean to you? Here's someone who is such a profound intellectual influence on you, and then accepts the offer to write the forward.

01-02:01:34

Vélez-Ibáñez: Eric Wolf was a splendid man, he was genuinely a modest, splendid, like you described [James C.] Scott, elegant individual. This is a guy who fought in World War II, in the Tenth Mountain Division, and was shot in the head, an Army veteran. He was a lieutenant in the Tenth Mountain Division and he was a dear friend of Angel Palerm, who was a Spanish loyalist who had also been wounded in the Spanish Civil War, and who moved to Mexico after the Spanish Civil War, to found the Center for the Superior Studies of Social Anthropology, one of the great theoreticians. Angel Palerm and Eric Wolf were buddies, were friends, and I made connections with Angel Palerm during that summer, later on. So here you have these connectivities between myself, Angel Palerm and Eric Wolf, and Eric Wolf, the first work I ever read by Eric Wolf was *Sons of the Shaking Earth*, and that was one of the hallmark books. That was his dissertation, by the way, *Sons of the Shaking Earth*, or had been his dissertation. So an awful lot of us who were looking for material and were looking for understanding, used Eric Wolf during the creation of the Chicano curriculum, and we really appreciated it.

So one time during an American Anthropology Association meeting in Los Angeles, Eric Wolf was president, and a bunch of us got together; Jose Cuellar, Roberto Alvarez, Steve Arvizu, and a bunch of us kind of joined together as Chicano graduate students, new assistant professors, and gave him an award, which was the Sol Azteca Award that we created, we made it up for him, and we held it in two rooms in the Hilton Hotel in downtown Los Angeles, and being kind of spontaneous marginal anthropologists and Mexicans, we decided to also have—and of course Jose Cuellar, who was this guy I mentioned to you before, that we split the fellowship with, was also a

musician, and he in fact put together, Dr. Loco's Rockin' Jalapeno Band, it's very famous in California and other places. Jose invited some conga players and a couple of saxophone players as well, and so we had music and Diego Vigil, another anthropologist who graduated out of UCLA in anthropology as well, and Jose and Diego graduated together out of UCLA, also the first generation like me. I was at UCSD, they were at UCLA, and Roberto Alvarez was at Stanford, so we were all cohorts of that period. Diego Vigil brought in, I remember, jugs of homemade wine, and put them on ice, and beer. Anyway, so what happens is that I'm trying to give Eric this award, and meanwhile, you have the conga players playing in the back, and the guys with the sax, and people drinking wine, and then we get this knock on the door and it's the cops and they're going to come in to arrest us because we're making so much noise. So then I had to shuttle Eric—after I gave him the award, I rushed him out a back way so he wouldn't get arrested, and that's how we made the initial connection with Eric Wolf, was through this *pachanga* that we had for him, and that's really the correspondence was generated after that. We still remember that party for Eric Wolf, but of course nobody ever knew about how Eric Wolf almost got arrested, so that's how that happened.

01-02:05:45

Holmes:

Oh, interesting. All right, well I think this is a good place to stop and we'll pick up after a break, the start of your official professorial career at UCLA.

01-02:05:55

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Okay.

01-02:05:56

Holmes:

Sounds good, thank you, Carlos.

## Interview 2: January 4, 2019

02-00:00:05

Holmes:

All right, this is Todd Holmes at the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is January 4, 2019. I am sitting down for our second session with Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez for the Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project. We are here at his office, at the School of Transborder Studies at Arizona State University, in the beautiful city of Tempe, Arizona. Carlos, thank you again. I wanted to maybe start off this session talking about some of your academic appointments. Before that, I want to talk maybe briefly, about your lectureship at the University of Washington.

02-00:00:45

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Oh, yes.

02-00:00:47

Holmes:

It was in the Department of Anthropology, but you were also, in the summer of 1974, the associate director of the University of Washington's Bilingual Institute. Discuss this experience and how this opportunity arose.

02-00:00:59

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Serendipity again, or cosmic convergence, one of the two. I was writing my dissertation in Seattle, after coming from back Nezahualcoyotl and trying to recalibrate myself, because Nezahualcoyotl was not only an intense experience, it was one in which I got pretty sick. Everybody was sick but I had typhus and all sorts of intestinal maladies and all that, and so I needed a place to kind of repose if you want, and I had the opportunity then, to do so in Seattle, Washington. At the same time, I met the associate director of this program, or the director of the program, in Washington State, at a conference of some sort, and he asked me if I could teach something and also name me as associate director of the program when he submitted the application for funding and I said okay, but I really didn't direct anything. So that's how I got the job teaching basically anthropology, to migrant women in the eastern part of Washington. I taught these classes and what I was able to do, I think relatively successfully, because they didn't go to sleep, and remember these are women who were migrant workers, so many of them hadn't finished high school. But what I did is I connected their migratory experience with the migration of Mexicans from south to north, and for the migration of the colonization process from south to north as well, and also north to south, because one of the things that I had learned and also kind of specialized in was to look at the way in which in fact you had language, Uto-Aztecan, spread from Mesoamerica to the north. So Hopi for example, and many of the Uto-Aztecan languages such as Pima, Yoeme and so on, in fact had their origin not across the Bering Strait, but rather because of migration from Mesoamerica to this area, occurring probably as early as 3000 B.C. So, I connected that kind of migration with their migratory practices, and that is why do you migrate? Well, you obviously migrate only for one basic reason, and that is in order to make a living. And so that's how I was able to connect then, the historical, as

well as the anthropological knowledge that I needed to impart about this population, with their own experience, and I did, I thought not a bad job for that particular time, but that's how I got associated with that. Then I taught a course at the University of Washington as well, again while I was writing the dissertation, and that's how I ended up at the University of Washington for a semester, teaching—I forget what it was—culture of personality or something, some silly course, but that's how I got there. That was really one of my first—other than San Diego State, one of my first university jobs.

02-00:04:28

Holmes:

Well then, after finishing the dissertation in 1975, you had some visiting assistant professorships at USC and then UCLA, hired full time at UCLA in 1976.

02-00:04:46

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Right.

02-00:04:47

Holmes:

Discuss your job market experience in that, particularly I guess in comparison to young academics on the job market today, most likely it was much different. Were you specialized as a Latin Americanist or a Mexicanist in anthropology?

02-00:05:06

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Well I think I mentioned to you that Juan Gomez-Quinones was the director of Chicano Studies, the Chicano Studies Research Center, and he had some FTEs that he was using in order to recruit Chicanos and Chicanas to UCLA. He was able to convince the Department of Anthropology that I was a viable candidate and so I was hired at UCLA as an assistant professor, but primarily because it was through Juan Gomez providing the teaching assistant professorship, not because UCLA was—the Department of Anthropology or any other department by the way—was recruiting Chicana and Chicanos, but basically because institutions like, or institutes like the Chicano Studies Research Center, provided the FTEs to the departments, but they didn't do this on their own.

02-00:05:58

Holmes:

Discuss your involvement with the center. Were you involved in its various activities?

02-00:06:02

Vélez-Ibáñez:

I was involved in it only as an academic, providing lectures and this sort of stuff, but as far as the directorship and all of it, all of that was Juan Gomez-Quinones and his staff and assistants and their creation of *Aztlán*, which by the way is a journal that I just had an article accepted to, and it's the first time I ever published with *Aztlán*.

02-00:06:25

Holmes: Oh, interesting. Actually, many Chicano scholars, many of their first publications, they look back nostalgically if it was in *Aztlan*.

02-00:06:36

Vélez-Ibáñez: Well I published one other, come to think about it.

02-00:06:38

Holmes: I think you did.

02-00:06:39

Vélez-Ibáñez: It was a homage to Antonio Burciaga, Antonio Burciaga from Stanford, I did write a little piece for that, but that's all, that's the only one that I've ever published with *Aztlan*, other than this one. This is the first real scholarly, it's a big huge, two-part piece with Luis Plascencia and Phillip Gonzales and Jesus Rosales, as my co-contributors of this—it's about a ninety-page, two-part article, so it's a biggie.

02-00:07:23

Holmes: Discuss maybe a little bit of the environment at UCLA, because as the story you were telling us before, with the chair of the department, it wasn't the warmest of welcomes I guess you could say. As a Chicano scholar, what was the environment there at UCLA like?

02-00:07:43

Vélez-Ibáñez: Part of the department had assistant professors who like me, had been trained in more than just ethnography, so they were paying attention to more demographic and statistical information than the major figures who were there. It was a highly stratified department in which the major figures, some of whom had been for example, presidents of the American Anthropology Association, many of whom had been there for twenty-five, thirty years, still had a kind of stodgy notion of what anthropology was. So a hierarchy was very much present and the kind of underlying narrative was one of stay in your place, don't make too much noise, earn your keep kind of thing. Well, the earn your keep kind of attitude has, in and of itself, an underlying message of don't rock the boat. Well, there were a number of us who came out of the seventies and late sixties and had already been in the service, you know we weren't about to lie down for anybody.

So, there were great differences, as well as feminist issues were real in that department. There was still harassment going on by major professors, of younger scholars, and a great deal of nonsense between some of the seniors and graduate students and very frankly, my generation looked at that as erroneous. It's not because we were holier than thou because we weren't, but we just didn't think that the power relationship between graduate students and major professors was appropriate. There was that contention and there was a great—that dynamic was there and it was people like Sally Falk Moore and others, who pretty well put a stop to some of the stuff going on, and also genuinely fine anthropologists like Jacques Marquet and others, who just

refused to put up with that kind of stuff, but that was certainly there. In terms of ethnicity, there was still a penchant for hiring only others like themselves—I mean, I was the first Mexican ever to be hired at UCLA in anthropology since its founding in the nineteenth freaking century, give me a break. UCLA is the University of California Los Angeles—Los Angeles, right? There hadn't been a single Chicano or Mexican anthropologist in the Department of Anthropology since its inception in the nineteenth century? Give me a break. So think about then, the kind of sick cover of legitimacy that one had to kind of contend with all the time, and that was always there.

So, the conflicts, I think, between the older and younger anthropologists were pretty constant and in fact, two of the younger anthropologists weren't awarded tenure in part because of that. I can give you a couple of examples. I was the first assistant professor to have been elected to the executive committee of the department, the first one ever since the nineteenth century, and I was elected mostly by my assistant professors, friends, colleagues, because they wanted to turn things upside down. We always had the meetings in a conference room and one day—I was living in San Pedro, which was seventeen miles, about seventeen miles south of UCLA, and I had a little girl who was only about nine months old at the time, and so I had to drive from San Pedro all the way to UCLA and the commute sometimes could get very heavy. But anyway, this one time the babysitter didn't show up because my spouse at that time was also a graduate student at another institution, and so I took care of our child when she was in school and vice versa. Well this time I had this meeting and the babysitter didn't show up, so I was late for the meeting and so I got into my 1972 VW Bug and drove all of 62.5 miles an hour, the maximum speed, to UCLA. I finally got there, I ran up to the third floor, went into the conference room, sat down next to the most senior anthropologist there, who had been the president of the American Anthropology Association, and I sat next to him, and he looked at me and he had this kind of epicanthic fold in his eyes, he says, "Oh, I see that you're late, which befits your stereotype," and I looked at him and I said, "Oh, I see that you mention it, which befits yours," and he looked at me and he didn't know whether to become angry or laugh, and he chose the latter and he broke out in laughter. After that, he was one of my strongest supporters. So that's an A but a very macho A.

02-00:13:34

But as well, in one of my classes, I had sixty-five students, I said something stupid or another and they laughed like mad, they roared in laughter, whatever it was. After class, we're coming out and one of the senior biological anthropologists comes by and he has this kind of made up Oxfordian accent, he's an American, he says, "Oh, I see that your class is in the midst of laughter, but are they learning anything?" And I said, "Oh, they laugh because they learn so much." [laughter] So, that gives you a sense of that. And then the last one. The last part was my fourth-year review, I got back my fourth-year



review of my work and the letter said, "We are not sure as to whether Dr. Vélez is more committed to his community or to anthropology," because of the work that I had done with the sterilization of Mexican women. Now, fortunately, the chair of the department was Jacques Marquet, who had been a Buddhist priest, and he also had worked in Southeast Asia for many years and in Africa in Ruanda-Burundi, among the Hutu and the Twa. Anyway, he wrote his letter, his independent letter, and he said it was very obvious that the committee erred because of its inherent racism.

02-00:15:17

Holmes: Interesting.

02-00:15:18

Vélez-Ibáñez: And so I was able in fact, to get past the fourth-year review. But if you want to know, to answer your question, that was the atmosphere, in which you always had to contend, this cushion of privilege and ideological premises about who you were and what you were and why you were, and that you were there as a favor to the Chicano Studies Research Center. But I earned tenure and the year that I earned tenure, I resigned and left, like I taught English to the kids speaking English I wanted to make a point and left for the University of Arizona.

02-00:15:58

Holmes: I wanted to ask a little bit about how did Juan Gomez get the FTEs?

02-00:16:09

Vélez-Ibáñez: Because of pressure from students.

02-00:16:12

Holmes: And was that also part of the EOP programs?

02-00:16:15

Vélez-Ibáñez: That was later.

02-00:16:15

Holmes: Okay.

02-00:16:16

Vélez-Ibáñez: EOP was much earlier.

02-00:16:21

Holmes: Yeah, I think it starts in '65.

02-00:16:22

Vélez-Ibáñez: EOP was much earlier, but EOP was absolutely imperative for the rise of the Chicano movement in universities, so there's no doubt about it, there absolutely is no doubt about it. EOP really, nobody has given the EOP sufficient credit for its contributions to the emergence of Chicano Studies, no doubt about it, but that's why, it was because of pressure. It wasn't because of noblesse oblige.

02-00:16:53

Holmes:

Well you mentioned your work and research on sterilization of Mexican women in Los Angeles. You served as an expert witness, as well as an applied anthropologist. Discuss that experience.

02-00:17:15

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Well, I should have known better, to apply the methodology. Actually, the methodology and techniques of application were okay, they were all right. It was the construct of explanation that was misapplied by the judge, that was the problem, it wasn't the work itself. The work itself, I think was okay, because what I did was I basically looked at the social networks of women and the density of their relationships, to see what the impact had been, of the unconsented sterilizations, and the way in which I determined that was to find out how they disengaged themselves from these relationships. And then there was a consulting psychiatrist who was never allowed, by the way, to in fact present his findings, who did an analysis of the levels of depression of these women. So then I did a statistical correlation between the levels of disengagement of relationships to the levels of depression that were concluded by this psychiatrist, and determined that a relationship of like .001 between the disengagement and their levels of depression. That, I thought was pretty darned good.

The part where I think I failed to provide a more useful and less contaminating concept was the notion of subculture, and that is that what I said was that 90 percent of these women were from rural areas, were very much involved in procreation and having the children as part of the rural subcultural tradition and so on and so on. So then the judge used the notion of subculture to rationalize the doctors non-culpability by saying that the doctors could not have known that these women were from a subculture and therefore could not have known the damage that such sterilizations would cause. Had I stuck to networks instead of getting into the notions of subcultures, which I thought at that particular time, they're not going to understand anything about networks; they're going to understand something about subcultural notions because in fact it was kind of common terminology. What I didn't really understand was its misuse at that particular point in time.

You had asked me earlier how I felt, and I told you I think I felt pretty sure about kicking myself in the rear end for some of these mistakes that I made. But nevertheless, those findings, I think were important in having folks understand the impact of these sterilizations on the cultural systems and the networks of relationships that the women had been a part. I think the lawyers—and other activists—took them to Washington and were able in fact, to create rules of consent for women who were undergoing these procedures, that they in fact could not ask them if they consented or not if they were under some kind of painkillers or sedated. So it did change, it did change that, but it didn't do the women an awful lot of good because they didn't find for them, they found for the doctors. So the aftermath of that is the lawyers, Antonia

Hernandez, who was a great lawyer, young, we were all very young, and kind of naïve too. So, we took our naiveté thinking that we could confront the dragon and the dragon ate us. If the women suffered from depression after that, we really—it was not comparable in many ways, we suffered from depression as well but not compared to the suffering that the women went through. For about a year I was pretty depressed and I never again served as a consultant, except for one other case in which I was relatively helpful, in the forty years since.

02-00:22:17

Holmes:

I wanted to switch gears a little bit and get your thoughts on the development of Chicano Studies, because certainly by this time in your career, as you're leaving UCLA in 1982, the field really had begun to take shape. In the interdisciplinary scholarship, if we look at the social sciences and history that's addressing this, what do you recall that struck you of the work of the first generation of Chicano scholars?

02-00:22:53

Vélez-Ibáñez:

They were all terribly important, because you had folks who were working for example, in demography and sociology, besides anthropology, certainly history. The cadres of historians that were being created, at UCLA especially, Alberto Camarillo, Nelson Cisneros, Devra Weber, Ricardo Romo, and others, these folks, the demographers, the sociologists, the historians, and also the anthropologists, but I think we were less important, except for the work of Diego Vigil and Roberto Alvarez, I think their contributions really Chicanoized anthropology, sociology and demography, so it was the other way around. See a lot of people think that because I'm an anthropologist and because I do this stuff, anthropology, that somehow I'm not also a Chicano scholar, but the fact of the matter is, we've changed the disciplines with our work, so the reason we have a School of Transborder Studies and the reason we had the Department of Chicana/o Studies before that, that was created, the first chair of whom was Ed Escobar here, was because of the influence of Chicano Studies in Ed's case, on history. I was able to come here in part because of the Chicano background and its influence on anthropology, so a lot of folks consider me, that I do this complex kind of systems stuff and it's really Chicano Studies, it's really Chicano Studies. I don't call it that but it really is. I mean this last book and this last essay, last two essays, I say basically hey wait a minute, the premise for my anthropology is Chicano Studies, period, so it's really the other way around. It's the influence of Chicano Studies and I don't think anybody's written about this. Maybe that's my next project and your work, I think will contribute to that strongly. Did Rudy mention that, by the way, when you talked about this, about how Chicano Studies influenced history?

02-00:25:20

Holmes:

Yes, yes, and I also interviewed Al Camarillo.

02-00:25:23

Vélez-Ibáñez: Al Camarillo, that's a perfect case and point. History has changed at Stanford because of Alberto and others, and certainly in literature.

02-00:25:34

Holmes: Yes.

02-00:25:34

Vélez-Ibáñez: Absolutely. So, Chicana/o Studies really hasn't been given the credit in shifting the narratives within the major disciplines. They still think of Chicano Studies as somewhere out there somewhere, or as a department by itself. No. Yeah, there are Chicana/o Studies, yeah there is a School of Transborder Studies, and so on. But the fact of the matter is, and the perfect example is this institution. This institution here has had more hires in Chicana and Chicano, and Latina/Latino Studies, in other departments, since I got here, than in the previous ten years. Part of it has been because of the interest generated by our school and department, the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies and the School of Transborder Studies, to the point is that we haven't gotten any new FTEs in this school in the last two or three years. Why? Because in fact, other departments are hiring Chicana and Chicano, and Latina/Latino scholars in their fields, in their areas, in those departments, and they changed then, the normalcy of the institution and the normalcy of those departments, and that dynamic, we haven't really written about this.

02-00:26:58

Holmes: It's very interesting that you bring that up. I usually ask this question towards the end, but I think our conversation is here, so I might as well ask it before I forget and have a senior moment myself. [laughter] It's a very interesting debate between having a Chicana and Chicano Studies department, or as someone like David Montejano has pointed out, of not isolating yourselves and actually having a broader program that allows those scholars to influence the other departments, meaning that they're not just helping out a program of Chicana and Chicano Studies, but having those scholars offering those courses in political science, in history, in literature. So you also have this kind of networking between the departments, around the field of Chicano Studies.

02-00:27:51

Vélez-Ibáñez: See but that's easily taken care of mechanically, with cross-listing, easily. Look, the biggest detriment to that dynamic are the traditional home departments themselves, who either refuse or don't recognize the efficacy of Chicana and Chicano Studies or Latina/Latino Studies, they look at it as something illegitimate. You still see this for example, in some community colleges, you see that, not so much in a university like this. It's only when those other departments come to recognize the validity, legitimacy, efficacy and standing of the scholars in this school, that makes it possible for them to go out, to think about hiring other scholars.

02-00:28:49

Holmes: That's very interesting.

02-00:28:50

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Why? Because in fact in our conversations, I can talk anthropology as well as any other anthropologist, or I can talk about theoretical construct as well as any other anthropologist, and so on and so on. So once you start interacting and they figure out your standing they say hmm, maybe there's something to it. And so in this institution, in the last, I would guess five, ten years, you see new institutes, Latina/Latino institutes, the emerging of sociology and political science and in history and in other places, downtown, so on and so on. ASU itself, unlike other universities further south that I won't mention, has probably created a much more welcoming context for Chicana and Chicano and Latina/Latino scholars than any other university that I've seen around.

The School of Transborder Studies, and we have our ups and downs and we have our problems and we have our issues, we are imperfect as any other unit, but we're the go-to place here. Right now, I have solicitations for as far as Pakistan, to come to study with me about borders. We just had a Chilean scholar of sociology of education, come here and work with us for about ten, fifteen days, on notions of "funds of knowledge" and other questions that we've been raising here. I'm on two dissertation committees in Mexican universities. Maria Cruz-Torres has, oh Jesus, she must have five, six, seven, eight dissertations from Latin America and from Mexico. Francisco Lara-Valencia over here, who is now the president of the Boarder Studies Association, has faculty, as well as students, that he works with in Mexico all the time, and in Latin America. So we've created something here that theoretically, methodologically and technically is very efficacious around the world, and that's what makes it different. Chicano Studies is about the world, it isn't just about Mexicans in the Southwest, it's about the freaking world. [laughter]

02-00:31:44

Holmes:

I like that, I like that. Well, thinking about this time, the first generation of scholars in this early moment, up into the 1980s, how was the field of Chicano Studies, this young and emerging field, viewed?

02-00:32:09

Vélez-Ibáñez:

It was a fight, it was a constant fight. It was a constant fight of influence, it was a constant fight of trying to have people recognize that there was another way of looking at stuff other than under the traditional departmental norms. It was a constant conflict, a constant fight, a persuasion of argument. ASU here is a perfect example. I wasn't here when this was happening, but certainly, people like Miguel Montiel and Ray Padilla, people from other departments, from other units, they're the ones who put together the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies. So these people joined together to put the department here, to assemble it, and this is fighting with the administration constantly and putting community pressure on them, calling people from outside of the university community and making telephone calls to the provost and to the president. So no, nothing was ever easy for us, nobody gave us anything. We didn't think we were privileged to have anything, we fought for what we got

and nobody handed anything to us. We just said give us the opportunity to create something special. We weren't asking for favors, we weren't asking for handouts, we were asking for participation of a narrative that was unbeknownst to them, but we knew to be true.

02-00:33:50

Holmes:

That's well said. Well, I want to switch gears here and discuss you coming back home in many respects right, coming back to Arizona. So after receiving tenure, you resigned from UCLA and took a position back at your alma mater, University of Arizona, and joined the Department of Anthropology. Discuss how that decision was made and how the opportunity arose there.

02-00:34:27

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Cosmic convergence and serendipity. [laughter] Okay, there was a job open at the University of Arizona, I was at UCLA, for a director of a student development program, for Hispanic students, so I applied thinking you know, my mom and dad were getting on in years, I thought it was time maybe to go home from UCLA. One day it took me seven hours to get home on the freeway from UCLA to San Pedro and I said you know that's enough, I can't do this anymore. So anyway, I applied for the job and I got turned down, said they hired somebody else. Then, Jim Officer, a wonderful anthropologist and one of the first people really to write about the Mexican narrative and the Spanish imperial narrative in Arizona and in Tucson, had a conversation with Bill Stini, who was the chair of the department, and they decided that I should take over, or they offered me the opportunity to take over what was then called the Bureau of Ethnic Research, which had been founded much earlier by one of the real stars in anthropology, which really focused on Native Americans. Later on, it was taken over by my friend—oh gosh.

02-00:36:03

Holmes:

Thomas Weaver.

02-00:36:04

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Tom Weaver, an anthropologist, and then he left it after doing excellent work on Mexican migration. It had been pretty moribund since then for a number of years so they said well, why don't you come in and redo, a humpty dumpty. So that's what I did, I was hired as an associate professor in anthropology and began working, basically not only reviving, but redoing the Bureau of Ethnic Research, which we turned into the Bureau of Applied Research and Anthropology, which became a pretty solid place, and I managed to hire a number of anthropologists. I was able to do so not because I got the FTEs and all of that at the front end. I had a total budget of \$17,000, of which from that I was supposed to not only have operations but also hire another anthropologist temporarily. So I hired Jim Greenberg, who in fact was living in Berkeley. I read his book, *Santiago's Sword*, but he didn't have a job, and I said to myself anybody who can think, can write like this, I want to work with, and so I hired Jim Greenberg as my first anthropologist of what was then called the Bureau of Ethnic Research. Later, I also became associate dean of

research for the college, and at that particular point in time they had what they called decision packages, in which you could put together a package and then have the state support it. Well what I did, in my usual kind of underhanded guerilla way, was to in fact create a program which included, I think eight FTEs, including five FTEs for the bureau, and two FTEs for another department, and that's how I was able to get the FTEs into the bureau and created the Bureau of Applied Research and Anthropology, and then hired some first-rate folks like Tim Finan and Tom McGuire and Helen Henderson and Jim and so on. That's how the Bureau of Applied Research and Anthropology got started, and then I redesigned it, recreated it into subunits and those subunits were very successful over time. We were generating something like about \$1 million a year in extra-mural research.

02-00:38:31

Holmes: Wow, which even now is an impressive amount, but we're talking in the 1980s.

02-00:38:38

Vélez-Ibáñez: In the 1980s, that's a lot of money, so we had projects all over the world. We had projects in Africa, we had projects in Brazil, in Mexico, and then that's when Jim Greenberg and I did our first study, the Mexican household studies in Tucson.

02-00:38:58

Holmes: Let's discuss that a little bit, because that actually became a really important study for later work that you would do.

02-00:39:04

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes.

02-00:39:04

Holmes: That opened up, I think a lot of intellectual doors outside of providing very valuable data that heretofore, or theretofore, was not really available. Discuss that research project, a little bit.

02-00:39:17

Vélez-Ibáñez: Well, the way we did it was really interesting too, because in fact what we did was we integrated both a survey method, as well as an ethnographic method within it, not unlike some of the stuff that I had done in Nezahualcoyotl, and some of the stuff that I had done with the *tandas* and *cundinas* there. What we did was we created a stratified random sample of Mexican households in Tucson, stratified by income and class, and a portion, a proper percentage to each of households, using zip codes, and selected the sample from that to be treated ethnographically. So we had, in other words, the data that emerged from the study itself, was not only reliable, but it was also verifiable because we went through all of the normative survey research techniques in order to acquire the sample, and then we treated each household, rather than head of household, but rather the entire household as a unit, and that was very different, it was one of the first times ever done.

From that emerged then, our understandings of the same two basic questions: how do people survive; how do people excel. Well, what we found in fact was not unlike Nezahualcoyotl. Mexican households, regardless of class, still maintained these very dense relationships and interactions between them, but we also came up with one other crucial concept that we hadn't generated before, and that is when we got back the questionnaires and some of the ethnographic information, we noticed that these households had an enormous array of knowledge. I think there were fifty-five households and when you put those households together, amazingly, you had this range of information that these people used, from aircraft mechanics to knowledge about herbs, to architecture, to how to figure out plumb in the construction of homes. There was this enormous array of what we call congealed information, in mathematics, computation, chemistry, biology, architecture, I mean you name it, all the basics of knowledge were all there.

Jim Greenberg and I were sitting, just like you and I are sitting right now, and Jim said, "You know, these look like—funds of rent," which was a very Marxist reference. I looked at him and I said well you know what, it doesn't seem like funds of rent but it seems to me more like funds of knowledge, and we looked at each other, you know what, you're right, they're funds of knowledge. So from that funds of knowledge notion emerges this alternative narrative. Rather than looking at Mexican households as these units of empty-headed persons speaking that funny language that's not transferable to the classroom, we said "Hey wait a minute, what if teachers learned that in fact these funds of knowledge are not only available, but they're available for instruction!"

So from that, we started talking to other people and we created then, a project with Luis Moll, who later picked up that notion of funds of knowledge and really ran with it and developed it much beyond what we developed, and also Norma Gonzalez, who was one of my graduate students by the way, and she stayed at the University of Arizona. She took her degree in linguistic anthropology with and they picked up that whole notion of funds of knowledge, and funds of knowledge, interestingly, if you were to look at Google Scholars and look at the references made to that, there are over five thousand references made to the notion of funds of knowledge. That notion of funds of knowledge that Luis Moll and Norma Gonzalez then developed much more fully, impacted on the schools, and so we generated other projects, together with Luis Moll and ourselves, and in fact taught teachers how to utilize these within the classroom.

02-00:44:34

Holmes:

In the study too, it seems that you also got a better understanding, and the data to support it right, of these extensive transborder network shifts and transborder ritual cycles.



02-00:44:52

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes.

02-00:44:54

Holmes: All of which, as one who grew up there, you likely knew existed, but allowed you to really kind of drill down on a greater detail of data to support that kind of—

02-00:45:14

Vélez-Ibáñez: See when you're part of something, you don't recognize it because it's "normal." It's only when you step outside of it and you say, "Huh, so that's what I've been doing." [laughter] I knew about all of this but it was not recognizable as an anthropological project. So when we were looking at these exchanges in relationships, I recognized them and they were obvious to me, but they were so obvious they were hidden. I mean that's kind of a contradiction this household study revealed and became very important for all of those reasons, yes, absolutely.

02-00:45:55

Holmes: And as I also said, this really helped propel a lot of future research, for at least not just others but also for yourself, as we'll discuss here in a bit.

02-00:46:08

Vélez-Ibáñez: Oh yes, absolutely.

02-00:46:10

Holmes: Well, I wanted to shift gears again, moving back to Southern California. So you moved home to Arizona.

02-00:46:15

Vélez-Ibáñez: Ten years.

02-00:46:17

Holmes: Yes, and then ten years later, in 1994, you went to UC Riverside, accepted a position there as a professor of anthropology.

02-00:46:29

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes, professor of anthropology and dean of the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences.

02-00:46:35

Holmes: Well, discuss the decision to move.

02-00:46:41

Vélez-Ibáñez: I was starting to repeat myself. I get bored easily if I start repeating myself. I was starting to do the same thing over and over and over again, and then this opportunity showed up at UC Riverside, and I got a call from them. I wasn't sure about it, whether I wanted to be a dean or not, I mean I had been doing administration at the University of Arizona for ten years, but I said you know what the heck, I might as well just try it. So I did it, and I applied for the job, hired, and I started making some changes, like I usually do, and from that I

also created the Ernesto Galarza Applied Research Center, which before had been the Ernesto Galarza something or another, enterprise, I forget what it was. Anyway, I shifted it to a more applied venture and we did a lot of work in the Coachella Valley and other places as well.

We really put together a number of research centers within the college itself, and the college itself was in fact the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, it was H and SS, but one of the things that I noticed in that college was that in fact, that the arts were playing a crucial role not only in the interest of students but the importance to the broader communities. So I on purpose, changed the title of the college to the College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, to CHASS and again, by serendipity and in combination with cosmic conversions, I happen to be able to also generate a very large grant from a foundation there in Los Angeles, to take the arts to the community. So the Gluck Grant, the very first Gluck Grant that we got, was about a half a million dollars, after I had gone to New York with a couple of other people and looked at what the Julliard School was doing, and they were doing some of this already. So the model for the Gluck Foundation arts program in Riverside, at UC Riverside, really was a version of what Julliard was doing already in New York. So we (Sarah Neiman and I) took that model back to Riverside and we put that project together, the foundation funded it and from 1995 to the present, 2021—they have generated about \$12 million in arts activity, where they send kids to the communities to give theater performances, dance performance, poetry readings, readings of novels, mural painting, orchestra, the whole array of artistic engagement.

02-00:49:55

Holmes:

Wow.

02-00:49:56

Vélez-Ibáñez:

That's how the Gluck Foundation arts program got started. If you look it up on the webpage, my name is not mentioned anywhere but I don't care, what's important is the Gluck Foundation arts program itself, but they've generated millions and millions, it's generated millions of dollars, but the most important part is not the money, it's the impact. They give, for example, performances in indigenous reservations, prisons, social service centers, old age homes, kindergartens, high schools, all over the county.

02-00:50:34

Holmes:

Oh wow – that's really impressive.

02-00:50:37

Vélez-Ibáñez:

That part, I'm pretty happy with.

02-00:50:44

Holmes:

Let's talk about the Ethnic Studies Department. Did you serve as interim chair?

02-00:50:50

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes. That's one of the reasons—it was filled with all sorts of conflict. See the problem is, they took—which is a serious mistake. It's again, this erasing process, erase Chicana and Chicano Studies and make it part of Ethnic Studies. You get Chicano Studies here, Asian Studies here, African American Studies here and you make it into Ethnic Studies, and what that generates is internal conflict over resources, always has, always will, and that's what happened to Ethnic Studies. The only way in which I could reduce the conflict was to become part of the department, so this is why in fact, I became the interim director of Ethnic Studies. I don't know whether I ever had a professorship in Ethnic Studies, I'm not sure, I don't recall, but it doesn't matter. To this day that department is filled with conflict over resources and faculty jumping ship from one department to another.

02-00:51:51

Holmes: Well, UC Berkeley has its own conflict, because they're in that same situation, which is very interesting.

02-00:51:59

Vélez-Ibáñez: Well, it's set up this way, structurally it can't go any other way. Now the only place where I've seen more or less where that's happened, not negatively, and let me tell you the story about that here. They in fact, at one particular point in time, when things got really nasty economically here, in 2008, they wanted to jell us, they wanted to conglomerate us within something comparable to Ethnic Studies, and of course not being prone to not voicing myself and others, we fought back tooth and nail. They've done it here for other units into schools but that looks like it's worked out fairly well because of excellent leadership. It doesn't work for others because the fight for resources is constant and then it becomes very nasty especially in trying to cross rigid disciplinary boundaries.

02-00:53:27

Holmes: Let's talk a little bit about the Ernesto Galarza Applied Research Center.

02-00:53:32

Vélez-Ibáñez: It was wonderful.

02-00:53:34

Holmes: The restructuring of this, as you were talking about, it almost seems like you took a lot of the key areas that you helped develop at U of A, with BARA, and brought it to UC Riverside.

02-00:53:50

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes I did, except that I didn't have the horses to do it, except I had Richard Chabran, who was a first-rate informatics scholar, historian as well, he created a number of projects in the Coachella Valley which really did benefit the population there. Ernesto Galarza Applied Research Center really focused around the Coachella Valley more than anything else, especially also training students to become researchers, that's the other part that we did there, which

was pretty successful I think. In fact, they did some of the initial studies of the state of the trailer parks in the Coachella Valley, where you had high levels of contamination and unhealthy conditions and other kinds of issues in those areas. So that did bring some change, because of the research that students carried out that we trained in the Coachella Valley consisting of high school students, because of projects that we had funded through the California Wellness Foundation. So that was pretty good.

02-00:55:02

Holmes:

I know in that center too, which the Coachella Valley was a part that you really started to conceptualize, to really take a deeper look at border communities, right?

02-00:55:14

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Yes.

02-00:55:16

Holmes:

And to be able to get, like you did with the Tucson house study, really to put together a lot of data for scholars and researchers, not just yourself, to build upon, to foster a deeper understanding of the dynamics and experience in that transborder region. This is also, if I'm not mistaken, where you began to play with the term the Southwest North American region, is that correct?

02-00:55:45

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Yes.

02-00:55:46

Holmes:

Discuss the terminology there, and the idea behind it.

02-00:55:52

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Well, the usual way which people treat this broader region is politically, that is according to states. Coahuila, Chihuahua, Baja, California, Sonora, so on and so on, and then Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and California. But those are political definitions that were created over time. It doesn't say anything about what people did in the region outside of those boundaries or processes that are occurring regardless of those boundaries. So, I started looking seriously, at the ecological basis of pre-Hispanic periods, how people survived again, and how they excelled, and the consequence of that is that you had these very complex systems like Paquimé, that looks like a carbon copy of Tula, fifteen hundred miles south of there, or Pueblo Bonito up north here or all of the Mesa Verde in the north and right here you have the old Pueblo, the Tohono O'odham Pueblo here, the Hohokam, and so on. You can't explain that politically, you've got to explain it in terms of what people were using, what economic and production means were they using, in order to deal with this environment that is not really selected for large populations. How do they do it? Well, the only way that they could do it was through irrigation, these irrigation systems basically, that made possible, the rise of these complex systems, period. No other reason. Then you have to ask the question how did they harbor the knowledge for all of that, and then the questions of migration,

of contact between Mesoamerica and this area, and vice versa. That led me to fundamentally understand well what was the impact of the Spanish empire then, on all that was already here, some of which had already waned. For example, Paquimé and the Hohokam here, were no longer in existence when the Spanish penetrated the region, but they impacted strongly from Veracruz, all the way to New Mexico, in their means of production that they established, and that they forcibly and by persuasion corralled people to support them and to work for them and also enslave them. [Establishing colonial empires means using an array of methods to establish hegemony and in the case of the Spanish it was the sword, pen, and crucifix as the major means.]

So their impact was enormous, but they had to adjust themselves to the specific ecologies where they were situated. So for example, Northern New Mexico and New Mexico, because of its variability ecologically, is very different from what became a cattle raising economy in Sonora. In New Mexico you had Puebloan towns along the Rio Grande and established agriculture while Sonora had less developed agricultural complexity. Basically, with Spanish colonialism cattle ranching and mining became the basis of the economy. So I said to myself, "Wait a minute, I'm letting this bifurcating line politically define this region." I took a different position to focus on the political ecology of the region, and that takes you in way much beyond the political boundaries. It makes you look at systemic economic and political and social relationships over time, and that's where history is a necessary and sufficient condition. To understand this, you have to look at this developmentally and historically over time and so therefore, from my point of view, we had to extend Chicano and Chicana Studies, and that's why the School of Transborder Studies, but the undergraduate degree is in Chicana and Chicano Studies, that I refused to remove, and we didn't really remove it. What we did is that we integrated Chicana and Chicano Studies within this broader scheme of Transborder Studies, which allows us to do a heck of a lot more both south and north. It doesn't replace Chicana and Chicano Studies once again, it expands its influence to cross borders imposed only two grandmothers ago.

02-01:00:37

Holmes:

I want to get to that here in just a minute but now, I wanted to see if you could reflect a little bit on the maturation of Chicana and Chicano Studies, because certainly by the time you're there at UC Riverside, we see the second generation of Chicana and Chicano scholars. The field is beginning to mature, not just in programs all throughout the West, as well as even on the East Coast, Midwest, but the scholarship is also expanding to outside of just the western region, into other parts and helping fuel Latina and Latino Studies. Thinking about your experience, say at San Diego State in 1969, to thirty years later there at UC Riverside, how did you see the field of Chicana and Chicano Studies develop and mature?

02-01:01:36

Vélez-Ibáñez: I think at UC Riverside it was stunted, compared to UCLA because of its amalgamation, compared to Sacramento State, compared to Northridge, compared to San Diego State. I didn't see UC Riverside's Chicana and Chicano Studies as being particularly strong at all. The scholarship reflected this compression, and except for one particular individual, was very limited, because in fact most of the work that was being done in Chicana and Chicano Studies was not in Chicana and Chicano Studies; it was being done in sociology, it was being done in literature and other places at this time. So as a body of work it was pretty weak, as a body, which is very different, for example from UCLA, that had the Chicana and Chicano Studies Research Center as the dynamic around which scholars from political science, anthropology and so on, could filter. And then of course, UCLA created its own Chicana and Chicano Studies Department, with very, very strong people, like Ray Macias and other people like that, but these are people who know each other. Ray Rocco in political science knows Ray Macias really well, they interchange and exchange all the time. The present director of the Center for Chicana and Chicano Studies [Chon Noriega] is a scholar of the humanities, art, theater, you name it, and he connects not only within the academics, but also within the broader artistic community. Chon has been able to maintain a real dynamic for Chicana and Chicano Studies at UCLA. So every school and every unit is different, but when you compared it to UC Riverside, UC Riverside was under developed compared to other schools because of the limitations of compression.

02-01:03:49

Holmes: About the field as a whole by the 1990s.

02-01:03:51

Vélez-Ibáñez: Oh, it was exploding, exploding, especially the work of women, and the work of women in history and literature, sociology, theater, music, I mean you name it's just—the creative arts, literature, I mean it just, boom, exploded. Mexican feminism is, I think, from my particular point of view, the key dynamic in making many departments and units successful, and you see that in the leadership of those units, of women, by women.

02-01:04:28

Holmes: If we look back to when you first were say dealing there at San Diego State, with trying to build the Department of Mexican American Studies, fast forward to the 1990s, as a whole, would you say that the field gained legitimacy by that time?

02-01:04:43

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes, it gained more legitimacy, much more legitimacy, because you see, you had graduates that were coming out of PhD programs. For example, the director of Mexican American Studies at San Diego State has a PhD in anthropology from UCLA. How are you going to suggest that somehow she's illegitimate? The interesting part of course, is that Chicana and Chicano

scholars are not coming out of doctoral programs in Chicana and Chicano Studies, except for UC Santa Barbara, I think that's the only one. I don't think there's another PhD program around except for ours, but this is you know, a degree more in Transborder Studies. Chicano Studies is an integral part of it but it's much broader than Chicano Studies in and of itself, as a field, not as an intellectual enterprise, Chicano Studies is much broader than that. So, comparatively, much stronger, especially in the humanities, and then there's another element that we haven't really talked about, and that is the impact of Chicano Studies and Chicana Studies in science. It isn't that the scientific enterprise changed its methodologies and techniques because of Chicana and Chicano Studies; it's because Chicana and Chicano Studies influenced graduate students who were becoming scientists and had a critical position that traveled with them when they became biologists or mathematicians and so on.

So one of the leading trainers of mathematicians at the University of Arizona is a guy by the name of William Yslas Vélez, my first cousin, and William Yslas Vélez is a theoretical mathematician who focuses on number theory as well as on signal processing. He is one of the originators of SACNAS, which is the Society of Latinas and Latinos and Chicano Scientists, and so they took the Chicano critique with them when they became scientists, and so you had people like Carlos Castillo Chavez, he's got the leading applied mathematics institution right here at ASU, who has probably trained more Chicana and Chicano and Latino and Latina mathematicians than anybody on earth, as well as Bill Vélez, who has probably taught probably thirty or forty Chicana and Chicano mathematicians, to become mathematicians. The problem is that these folks are not being replaced. Bill Vélez at the University of Arizona, who has done such a marvelous job, he's not being replaced and that's got to stop. On the other hand, one of the genesis for these cohorts of scholars is the Ford Foundation fellowships, and, that program is singular in its impact in producing Chicana and Chicano, Latino and Latina scientists in biology, astronomy, physics, astrophysics, biochemistry, you name it. So, what emerges as Chicano Studies and the Chicano movement, leads them to the shift of the participation of critically viewing science, not science itself, but the participation of scientists in scholarship.

02-01:09:13

My cousin Bill just wrote a couple of wonderful articles on the borders created in mathematics. Instead of welcoming students to come over into mathematics, they create borders of them to not be able to climb over the damn walls, and so even the metaphors being used, really emerges out of Chicano Studies. So when you talk to my cousin Bill he says, "I'm a Chicano, period, I'm a mathematician who is a Chicano," or "I'm a Chicano who is a mathematician," the two are interconnected, they're interrelated.

02-01:09:54  
Holmes:

That is fascinating, because I've never heard the influence of the field and scholarship be applied to the actual sciences, because we're usually looking at

humanities and social sciences, particularly even in these interviews, you know in the project.

02-01:10:13

Vélez-Ibáñez: Oh yes, no, no, the impact of the Chicano movement and Chicano Studies has been enormous but we haven't detailed all that impact and one of these days we need to. Maybe that's one of the things I'll take up. I already know the impact, for example, of the Ford fellowships in the sciences. In the last twenty years, Chicano scientists and those who went to the Ford Fellowship Program have generated over \$180 million in research.

02-01:10:47

Holmes: Wow.

02-01:10:47

Vélez-Ibáñez: I have that, that's all empirical stuff that I did.

02-01:10:50

Holmes: Well, on a related note, I know in discussing the various fields and influences of Chicano Studies, particularly with the second generation we're looking at by the 1990s, an important area that develops is the borderlands. This becomes a topic and usually recognized not only with yourself but also David Weber, who I actually had the privilege of meeting my first year in graduate school. Discuss this a little bit. I know we'll get into a little more detail with when talking about some of your work here in just a minute, but that transborder experience has always been something in much of your work, that you're looking at and exploring, but there seems to also be this new interest in borderland. So we have borderlands history, borderland studies. For you, was this also another way, if we look at the 1990s, of also pushing back in a critical way against a lot of the anti-immigrant, and almost xenophobia of what was going on at that time.

02-01:12:03

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yeah, I've always been pushing back, because that xenophobia, I looked at it very early, when I was fourteen, fifteen years old, and saw people being picked up off the streets, or the comments made to my dad, or not being able to go to a swimming pool here in Phoenix because you were segregated, or maybe only go swimming on Sunday, when the whole week had been taken up with other people's bodies in the swimming pool. Or being turned back at a swimming pool because during the summers I got really dark, and my sister with blonde hair and blue eyes, and she was let in and I wasn't. So the pushback has always been constant, the pushback has never stopped, regardless of what you do.

02-01:12:51

Holmes: But thinking of it in the 1990s as well, you had various propositions in California and I think also here in Arizona that really, I think the for the first time since the 1950s or '60s, just put it very nakedly on the table.



02-01:13:07

Vélez-Ibáñez: But you see what's interesting for me is this guy who is president here. The guy who is president here is a man by the name of Michael Crow, who singlehandedly, I think has done more to develop this university to a major university than anybody else. Now there were people before him who did an awful lot of good work and so on, Lattie Coor is another, but Crow hired a whole bunch of us at the same time—he raided other universities and hired a bunch of us and basically the message was undo humpty dumpty and redo it into something special, and make sure that people have the opportunity to participate and enroll in this university to become educated because that's key for everybody. Right in the middle of 1070, what is founded here? The School of Transborder Studies. Now this president is making a statement. He just didn't do this because he likes me, he doesn't make decisions because he likes you. He makes decisions that are strategic. He knows full well that this community and that this integrated political economy is for real and you cannot separate them merely because you call one Mexican and the other one American. So right in the middle of 1070, right in the middle of all this hogwash, Crow comes along and says okay, yeah, you can turn the Department of Chicano Studies into the School of Transborder Studies, and not only that, I'm going to give you \$500,000 so you can redo this entire complex here, in the image and likeness of what you want.

02-01:15:12

Holmes: That's a pretty nice statement indeed.

02-01:15:15

Vélez-Ibáñez: That's smart, and he's still doing it.

02-01:15:19

Holmes: Well, I want to come back to that here in a minute. Here I wanted to segue a little bit, into your scholarship during this period if we could, starting off with your book in 1996, *Border Visions*, which was well, it's a keynote book in many disciplines, and I think it really seemed to put a lot of your scholarship and intellectual thinking about this transborder experience together in many respects. Discuss how this book project came about.

02-01:16:12

Vélez-Ibáñez: The strong influence really comes out of the Mexican household project, of the variability of the population and the heterogeneity of the population, but that couldn't be appreciated unless you appreciated it historically, because if you recall, the book doesn't start with Mexicans in the nineteenth century, it starts with the pre-Hispanic period, taking on this notion of a region, although the error that I made in that book, which I try to make up in the *Hegemonies* book, is to locate most of it north of the border. I should have located an equal amount south of the border, but I think it would have gotten lost and not only that, but there was, in Spanish we called it an *apuro*—a hurry—that is there was a sense of being, of locating this work so that people could read it. I didn't want to write it in such a scholarly way that people would get lost in the

jargon, so I wanted to write it differently. I wanted to write it so that people first of all could understand it as well feel it. I don't write just up here, I write many times because it emerges out of my body, it emerges out of my soul. A lot of scholars don't recognize that that's what's happening to them but that's what you do, you write from the inside out, not from the outside in. If you write from the outside in only, then it becomes jargon. You've got to write it from what you feel and what you think and how you smell and how you touch things, that's the anthropology I guess, within me.

*Border Visions* emerges out of the household studies, of recognition of the heterogeneity of the population, but also for the need of something whole, that went beyond sociology or anthropology or history or psychology, and something that brought to bear a different narrative about the population, that's why it's called *Border Visions*, and that's why it's Mexican cultures, not Mexican culture, because I tried to capture the heterogeneity of the population through these different lenses: through a historical lens, through households, through literature, through art, and I didn't do music because I don't know anything about music, except for that I hear. Also, the kind of statistical stuff that comes out in that one chapter on the distribution of sadness, and the distribution of sadness then takes on statistically and theoretically, major issues of these communities in this region. But also, I wanted to leave people with hope, not unlike the short story, with the fact hey, this is a population that's been struggling through all of its existence, in different ways and different forms, and yet it does not give up, it won't, and this latest hubbub, with this person that we have as president, sooner or later we're going to overcome him too, there's no doubt about it.

02-01:19:47

Holmes:

I like how you put together, I think if I'm remembering correctly, right after, you know the "Distribution of Sadness," is also then you start looking at the positive effects of Chicano literature and art.

02-01:20:00

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Yeah, exactly, that's the fulcrum, it's like this. By the way, that's one of my critiques of anthropologists who do work on Mexicans in general, whether they're Mexican themselves or Anglos themselves, with Mexican communities, they're only looking at the downside of stuff. I know some books, for example, along the border, there's not one piece of laughter, there's not one compadre, there's not one birthday, there's not one baptism, there's not one tamale, there's nothing about the flesh and blood of people. It's only "look at these poor downtrodden little Mexicans," horse-pucky, that's not what we are. Part of that is us but that's not all, we are many other things other than that. And so one of the problems that I have with some of these anthropologists who are only writing about gangs, and not about their parents and not about other aspects of themselves, but only the gang behavior, is that there are other aspects, there are other parts of this population that you have to consider. If you look at gangs, we're talking about 10 percent of the

adolescents between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one, 10 percent. Well, what about the other freaking 90 percent who are not in gangs? There's no balance.

02-01:21:38

Holmes: Well, and it's a bit sensational too right?

02-01:21:41

Vélez-Ibáñez: Of course. And of course, it feeds right back into the poor little Mexican machine. [laughter]

02-01:21:51

Holmes: I wanted to ask you, because in part two of the book, when you're discussing the Chicano movement, and that's where you do use the term, "The great Chicano convulsive transition."

02-01:22:04

Vélez-Ibáñez: Transition, yes.

02-01:22:06

Holmes: Discuss that a little bit. You used that earlier in our discussion.

02-01:22:10

Vélez-Ibáñez: The convulsive transition system, as I mentioned, comes out of Neal Houghton's work about the global revolutions that were occurring post-1960s, and that in fact, people haven't located these American versions of that great convulsive transition system. What I tried to do is to locate these movements within this much broader global transitional process of decolonization, that's really what that's about.

02-01:22:49

Holmes: There were some reviewers who kind of laughed, historians largely, who didn't know about the convulsive transition. I almost want to say it was Ricardo Romo who was wondering, you know, I'm not sure that this name is going to stick but it's interesting. [laughter] In using that term, was that in a sense, to kind of nudge other scholars to think of the Chicano movement more broadly?

02-01:23:33

Vélez-Ibáñez: That's right, that's exactly right, that the population is interconnected and always has been, from the pre-Hispanic period to the present, and it's always been interconnected to much broader dynamics, to much broader processes. That's why I call this border over here a bifurcation, it's a bifurcation that's only two grandmothers old, like I said before, that's it.

02-01:24:03

Holmes: Well and I think you state in the introduction, that the larger, the holistic aim of this book, was to really put the border in its proper cultural space and place, showing its diversity, showing the long networks, transborder networks, life in the region before there was a bifurcation. I always thought that's one of the

aims of borderland studies, right, to pretend that this line isn't there, which is exactly what you're trying to do with the southwest region of North America, right.

02-01:24:43

Vélez-Ibáñez: See, but the problem with borderland studies is that that also creates boundaries, in and of itself it creates borderlands boundaries, and my suggestion is that you think about this regionally, rather than as a borderland, defined by a bifurcation that's only two grandmothers old. Now, if you want to distinguish between *fronteras* in Spanish and borders in English, they're two different things. *Fronteras* merely means the outmost space and place that you have control over, border means you're dividing something against the other, and they're two different meanings. So when Mexicans use *la frontera*, they're talking about the extension of control, either cultural or linguistic or whatever it is that it may very well be, but that suffers also from boundaries. The way I use the regional stuff, what I'm suggesting to you is that historically—and here we get into the whole notion of what history is, I mean you know archeologists talk about pre-history, really? Anyway, what I'm trying to suggest is that you have to pay attention to the economic, social and political dynamics of the region, not the thing and how people settle in and settle out, and how you ruin stuff and create others, and how you're able to survive and how you're able to excel.

02-01:26:30

Holmes: Well this also leads to an edited volume that you put together, *Transnational Latina/Latino Communities: Politics, Process and Culture*, really in the sense taking that very argument of looking at transnational relationships, something that you've been interested in for decades by this point. Discuss the genesis of that anthology.

02-01:26:59

Vélez-Ibáñez: I didn't initiate that, Anna Sampaio did. Anna Sampaio is a brilliant young political scientist who said you know, I want to put together this transnational book, and so on and so on, and can you help me with it. I don't recall whether I was still dean or not, I don't remember, but this is at UC Riverside. Anna said, "You know, it would really be helpful if you lent your name to this and why don't you read these various contributions that people want to make and why don't you write something or another." So I said I would because in fact that was the direction I was going anyway.

02-01:27:50

Holmes: Well, I want to use that to jumpstart coming back to Arizona from UC Riverside and coming here and accepting a professorship with the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department, as well as the chair, I believe. Was that immediately?

02-01:28:09

Holmes: Here at Arizona State. Discuss your decision to return.

02-01:28:16

Vélez-Ibáñez: I was getting bored at UC Riverside. [laughter]

02-01:28:21

Holmes: There's a lot of stereotypes about Riverside.

02-01:28:23

Vélez-Ibáñez: Well, I mean I got bored at Arizona, and then I got bored with UC Riverside, but frankly, the other thing is, I was reaching an age as well as a time in my life that I thought I should get back close to home. I have grandchildren and children in Tucson and I thought it was time for their grandpa and dad to get a little closer to home. So, my wife, who is also an anthropologist, said hmm, that sounds like a good idea, and so we both decided to come back, or at least for me to come back to Arizona, to tell you the truth. Although remember, I'm a U of A graduate, so therefore, I get reminded constantly by people that I'm a U of A alum and of course U of A alum call me constantly, because I work at ASU, but I say plagues on both your houses, I'm comfortable in doing what I'm doing.

02-01:29:22

Holmes: You developed your own school, tell them that. Well why don't we discuss a little bit your experience coming back to ASU and especially chairing the Chicana and Chicano Studies Department.

02-01:29:37

Vélez-Ibáñez: When I came, I got a call, I forget. I don't remember, was it Ed who called me? I think it was Ed Escobar who called me and he asked me if I were interested in this and I said, "Well Ed, you're going to have to understand, if I go to ASU, I want to do something very different, I want to make Chicano Studies part of something larger, because I think that's where we should go, that's the direction we should go in," and I explained to him, more or less what I wanted to do. He says, "Well, hell, apply anyway." So I applied and I gave the pitch to my colleagues who were here already and I said, "You know basically what I'd like to do is to transform the department into something broader, into some kind of a transborder enterprise," so I said, "If you want me, expect that that's what I'm going to do." So, basically with their help and with their assistance and sometimes in contradiction to and sometimes in opposition to, we developed the School of Transborder Studies.

02-01:30:49

Holmes: So you came here in 2005, it was about six years, I think in 2011, you founded the School of Transborder Studies.

02-01:30:56

Vélez-Ibáñez: We went through some transitions. It was the Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies, and then we added Latina and Latino Studies, because of the new populations that were coming into the region as well. And then after six years, after an awful lot of discussion, a lot of arguments, we took a vote to

rename the school as the School of Transborder Studies and it won by one vote, as I recall. So, we've been pretty successful since then.

02-01:31:30

Holmes: Not to rehash bad blood, but if you could give us maybe a glimpse at the sentiments of those who opposed, what were the arguments against?

02-01:31:40

Vélez-Ibáñez: Because they weren't sure about the efficacy of this new way of doing things, and whether that wouldn't undermine the Chicana and Chicano Studies aspect of what we were doing, and I don't think it did. I think it expanded to other populations and to other parts as well, and also very frankly, it got us closer to Mexico, theoretically and methodologically, and also in terms of our coursework as well, and we should have, yeah.

02-01:32:15

Holmes: Well, I'm interested in that, because I know in the research for this and reading up on the school, that you also began to foster networks with Mexican universities.

02-01:32:29

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes.

02-01:32:30

Holmes: Visiting scholars, et cetera. Discuss how you put these together and the impact it had.

02-01:32:37

Vélez-Ibáñez: Well, I already had relationships with Mexican scholars and the University of Mexico and so on. So, all I did really, was kind of make that a little more formal, and people started becoming interested in what we were doing and visiting, a lot of visits from Sonora, a lot of visits from different parts of Northern Mexico, about what we were doing and how we were doing it. [Maria Luz Cruz Torres is also a Mexicanist and has worked on the political ecology of northwest Mexico for a number of years has excellent relations with Mexican universities and research institutions like CIESAS.] In addition, we hired Francisco Lara-Valencia, who had been at COLEF at one time, he and his wife both, and both of them are in fact Mexicanists but who work on the Mexican side of the border mostly. Francisco is an urban planner whose interests lie on both sides, so his presence here then congealed, if you want, the transborder part of that, in comparison to other parts of the faculty, who generally stuck pretty much north of the border. I don't think any of them, except for a film by Espinosa, on migration—Espinosa did some films on immigration and in the movement of people from Baja, California, into Los Angeles and the Los Angeles area, Westminster area, but his scholarship really wasn't of Mexico, basically it was all north of the border. In terms of literature, his wife was highly knowledgeable of both Mexican literature and Chicano literature, so that was another connection, but most of the other scholars, like Ed Escobar for example, never worked in Mexico, mostly

California, mostly Los Angeles. Hired a demographer who works basically north of the border as well and three new recent hires mostly work only north of the border region. So we still have to this point, a balance between scholars who do both sides and scholars who only do one side, but that's a pretty good balance. And we have some scholars who only do Mexico. So in a way we have some faculty who do both, some faculty who only do one or the other, but our conversation however, both theoretical and methodological, is pretty serene, there's no argumentation about that. There may be argumentation about emphasis but there's no argumentation about the fluidity of our conversation.

02-01:35:40

Holmes:

Discuss the interdisciplinary aspects of the school. So, you're an anthropologist, and then the school itself houses a number of different disciplines, just as Chicana and Chicano Studies has been interdisciplinary from the very start, right?

02-01:35:56

Vélez-Ibáñez:

That's right.

02-01:35:57

Holmes:

Discuss that a little bit and then how the curriculum is created.

02-01:36:00

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Every single one of the scholars have what I would call the Chicano/Chicana mindset, all of them. It doesn't matter whether you work in Mexico or whether you work here, they all have the mindset, that is this critical insistence by shifting narratives, that's what ties everybody together. Some of the scholars complain because you know, they're not doing work with each other and they're not writing together or whatever. Wait a minute guys, you've got it wrong, you all have basically this Chicano mindset and Chicana mindset of shifting the narratives, of changing the narratives, that's what connects us and that's what connects the curriculum. So if you're doing demographic analysis of populations over time, that very analysis has to be disaggregated. So you look at Mexican origin populations at a particular point in time, you're looking at Central American populations coming into this country at a particular point in time. In other words, you're historicizing demographic phenomena, rather than only treating it as data. That's what makes it different, the historicization of information leads to a shift in the narrative, without which it becomes static and you're only looking at how many people do this, how many people do that and really, you don't understand the processes underneath that. So to answer your question, that's where the interdisciplinary comes in, it really does.

02-01:37:51

Holmes:

That's interesting. Well, I wanted to switch back a little bit to cover at least your most recent phase of scholarship, since you came here at ASU. Your 2010 book, *An Impossible Living in a Transborder World: Culture, Confianza, and Economy of Mexican-Origin Populations*. Now this expands

significantly on your work of the *tandas*, that you published in 1983. What inspired you to come back to that topic and to do a deeper study?

02-01:38:31

Vélez-Ibáñez: Not a new understanding, a further understanding, a further embellishment of what I thought to be true, a sophistication theoretically, an advancement in my own thinking about what I had been observing before, a better explanation of why, a better understanding of responding to the two basic perennial questions. That's why I came back to it, and to look at this stuff from a fresh angle, rather than from what I would call the turgid functionalist position that I used before, to a much more materialist and dynamic position. See, if you don't shift and change and you remain where you were, you don't grow, you can't grow that way, and the people who pay the piper for your conservatism are your students. So I had to write this in order to free myself in a way, from the constraints of the former book, that freed me to do *Hegemonies* later, that freed me to do this last book on Nezahualcoyotl and *Aztlan* business, that I still can't get a reviewer for. Anyway, but that's why. It freed me theoretically, from the shackles of the kind of functional theoretical position I had before. There are reasons why people are doing X, Y, and Z, and here's why, so in a way it's a reflection of a theoretical recognition beyond where I was.

02-01:40:41

Holmes: You also, that same year and the few years afterwards, published three anthologies and they were published in Mexico.

02-01:40:53

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes.

02-01:40:54

Holmes: To give the titles, translated of course, *Cultural Diversity, Racism, Exclusion and Xenophobia on the Northern Border of Mexico and the United States*, that was published in 2010. In 2011, *Transborder Identities: Migration and Chicano Culture*, and 2016, *Views From Here and There: Implications of Anti-Immigrant Policies on Mexican-Origin Communities*. Discuss the origins of these three works, and particularly, publishing in Mexico. In many respects, when I was going through these, it was almost a recognition of Chicana and Chicano Studies is not just important in the United States, but we see that dynamic in transborder.

02-01:41:37

Vélez-Ibáñez: That's right, Mexicans have learned. [laughter] See, this was a time that it was absolutely crucial that Mexicans were starting to read Chicano literature, they were starting to read the sociology of Mexicans. They were starting to really come to an understanding that those were just not *pochos* over there, all right, those were just not those funny people who don't know how to speak Spanish, because they're so acculturated because they want to be gringos. That position is as erroneous as the victim Mexican on this side. So, in a way my job was to help Mexicanos come to a realization of the efficacy of this population,



bifurcated only two grandmothers ago. So I tried to, as much as possible, to write in Spanish as well, with colleagues from Mexican institutions, so that bridge could be created through scholarship. Now there had been other Chicanos, like Manuel Carlos, who was an anthropologist who had been writing in Mexico, with Mexicans as well, but never, he never really developed this kind of joint authorship, because if you'll notice, some of these authorships, I'm primary, others I'm secondary. There's a reason for it, because I always didn't want to be upfront, because that is part of the colonial project, you know, and so we took turns. They were first sometimes, I was first sometimes, I was second sometimes, and so that's to tie the notion of Transborder Studies, manifested it in these works.

02-01:43:46

Holmes:

In looking at these, this is exactly what I thought too, is that it's not only just a statement, but also I think a great example of what this school was aiming to do, in conducting this scholarship with partner universities in Mexico and distributing that to young scholars and students in Mexico.

02-01:44:09

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Right. And publishing with young scholars from Mexico, because Navarro was a relatively bright new graduate. Where did she graduate from, Manchester? I don't remember, I think she graduated from Manchester as well, but she was working in Mexicali and so yes, so I wanted to make sure that she got upfront as a young scholar.

02-01:44:36

Holmes:

Lastly, your most recent monograph, *Hegemonies of Language and Their Discontents: The Southwest North American Region since 1540*. This again is expanding, I think, on past scholarship and past thinking, looking at again, that region, but also using it—which to me just seemed just a very brilliant kind of lens of let's start with language, right, to look at the dynamics of this region. Where did the genesis for that project come from?

02-01:45:21

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Do me a favor, pick up the book for a minute and let me have it, and I'll answer you in a roundabout way.

02-01:45:29

Holmes:

All right.

02-01:45:30

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Okay?

02-01:45:30

Holmes:

Oh this is even better, we get a reading.

02-01:45:38

Vélez-Ibáñez:

I'll have to put my glasses on. Antediluvian experience. Okay. [reads] "I knew something wasn't quite right when the bubble-nosed principal yanked me out of the line of first grade children waiting to walk into their classroom in

Tucson. He pulled me to his office where he rationalizes punishment by prefacing the swats I was to receive with the statement that it was a school rule not to speak Spanish, or in any other tongue. I had no idea what this meant at the time, even after the three hits with the smooth ended paddle he used to impress me with what I didn't understand. I have been trying, I think, to understand this for the next many years that I have lived. Reference, me, reflection and recollection of how to begin this book, August 30, 2015." [laughter] That's the best answer I can give you, so the genesis comes from the very first paddling.

02-01:46:50

Holmes: Interesting.

02-01:46:52

Vélez-Ibáñez: But that also led me to the paddling of Native Americans by Spanish authorities, and that led me to the paddling of English speakers of Mexican children and also of Native Americans, it also led me to the paddling by *mestizos* of native peoples in Mexico. And then, how to stop the damn paddling, and so that's why the book and that's really what it comes from, and that's why I included it as one of the prefatory remarks in the first chapter of the book.

02-01:47:27

Holmes: I thought that was brilliant. What was the reception of this book?

02-01:47:34

Vélez-Ibáñez: I don't know yet. [Now I do and they were excellent with appropriate critiques.]

02-01:47:35

Holmes: It was only 2017 so yeah, it takes a while actually, right?

02-01:47:39

Vélez-Ibáñez: Well, it was published in December of 2017.

02-01:47:42

Holmes: Yeah, so it's only been about a year.

02-01:47:43

Vélez-Ibáñez: There's one review out by David Sanchez, a Native American scholar who basically said that he's got to change his way of thinking about doing stuff among Native Americans because at least of the initial parts of this book.

02-01:48:04

Holmes: Some of your previous works also went into that. When you look at that region, that it's not just again, once we take away that bifurcation, we're not looking at just Anglos and Mexicans, right?

02-01:48:16

Vélez-Ibáñez: That's right.

02-01:48:17

Holmes: You have to look at indigenous communities that were very diverse, which you bring up in your previous work. To me, in looking at that, really that work really kind of situated the region as a place of encounter, if we wanted to use that term.

02-01:48:31

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes, that's exactly correct.

02-01:48:34

Holmes: A cultural encounter.

02-01:48:35

Vélez-Ibáñez: Right. But it's an encounter over resources, it's not just kind of an imaginary feel good stuff, you know this multicultural position of having differential cultural positions. That's important but historically what's important here and always has been, in this entire region, this huge region, is conflict over resources and who gets them and who takes advantage of them and all of these stupid, idiotic rationalizations that we utilize in order to prevent people from having them, and creating racialized positions in order to rationalize our differentiation, based on melanin for God sakes.

02-01:48:32

Holmes: Well that also leads us to an anthology that you published that same year.

02-01:48:38

Vélez-Ibáñez: Which one?

02-01:48:39

Holmes: *The US/Mexico Transborder Region: Culture Dynamics and Historical Interactions*, which in a sense is again, coming back to this vast and complex region of study, which had sat at the center of your attention for decades. This work is almost a culmination of this and bringing in other scholars, which is funny, as I just thought about too, because if you wind back the clock, in 2017, you were starting to grapple and kind of trace a lot of these dynamics that are discussed by other scholars, almost a generation before.

02-01:50:19

Vélez-Ibáñez: That's right.

02-01:50:20

Holmes: And so as editors, you were able to see a younger generation.

02-01:50:24

Vélez-Ibáñez: Right, but that was my whole point. You know the way that book got started? The conversation with Joe Heyman, my coeditor on this book, in a conversation, because Joe is brutal in his critique of ideas of people and things, which I thoroughly enjoy. He was one of Eric Wolf's last students, and I met Joe, as a matter of fact, at the Bureau of Applied Research and Anthropology, while he was doing his dissertation research work in Douglas

and Cananea a number of years ago. Anyway, so Joe said to me one day, "You know, you should redo *Border Visions* because it's really dated," and I said, "Joe you know, you have a tendency of making me do things or wanting me to do things that I really don't want to do but you're right, it is dated." So, being the kind of finder of easiest ways to do the same thing, I said why not have a session on the latest transborder research, utilizing this notion of the Southwest North American region as a kind of frame and see what pops up. Well, we had I think we two panels, at the applied meetings in 2015, wonderful work, just absolutely wonderful work, and it was wonderful not because of the stuff that I had done or because necessarily—although Joe's work is wonderful as well—but because we had generationally different scholars. We had students who had only finished their PhD maybe two years before, to well established scholars from the University of Texas, El Paso and other places, and so the book itself really emerges out of that dynamic, in which Joe embarrassed me to think about redoing this dated book, and that's really how that work came out.

The reviews, there have been two reviews. One review by a scholar in geography who didn't like it because I didn't mention him, and also because there were some errors, some printing errors in the book, and he says that it was riddled with printing errors. That's not true, there was maybe two or three, but then you know you get that, any book that you print always are going to have some errors. And then another one by another scholar from University of not Manchester but one of the other English schools, that was very laudatory about the work, and it looks like it's been doing very well, but that's because of the presence of the younger scholars, I mean they kicked everybody's butt in language and in work about contamination and environmental degradation and trade and so on. And then it was kind of a test case for me, leading to *Hegemonies*, because the article that I wrote on language, because there's a whole section on language, it begins with Jane Hill's work and then with my work on the Spanish period, and then Joe's work on the contemporary period, so it historically takes up pre-Hispanic to the Spanish period to the present period of the region. That whole book is, from my point of view, maybe not from the geographer's point of view, a very dynamic book, because of the contributions that the kids made, the younger scholars are just fabulous, just absolutely wonderful. It was a wonderful experience.

02-01:54:33

Holmes:

Well, I wanted to hear, in closing our interview, I wanted to get some of your reflections. Some of this we've discussed, but the field has matured. Again, looking back from your early days at San Diego State, the field has just grown and matured in ways that probably many thought were not imaginable at that time. In your view again, what were some of the major developments in the field of Chicana and Chicano Studies over the last fifty years?

02-01:55:04

Vélez-Ibáñez:

The historitization of the populations, for me that is the most important contribution and development, is historicizing the population past stereotype, past normative positions about the populations, and really coming to grips with the historical heterogeneity of the populations, of its participation in punctuating points and events over the last five hundred years, because really, this mestizo population is only five hundred years old, they're only made possible because of the genetic transfer and transmission, in conflict generally, between the Spanish empire and native peoples, period. But the last five hundred years have been generally erased because of the bifurcation, both in Mexico by the way and in the United States, so from my particular point of view, it's that historitization of the last five hundred years that's most important, and all of the siloed social sciences; psychology, sociology, anthropology, demography if you want to make that part of it, has to shift its attitude to consider this heterogeneity and this historical development of these populations.

See, one of the critiques that Eric Wolf makes in one of his initial lectures at City University in New York, and also in his book, *Europe and the People Without History*, is that the very siloing of social sciences into these various domains, creates people without a history. And I'll take it one step further, in the utilization of psychometric and psychological and performance studies, further contributes to the siloization and to the de-historitization of populations, and replaces that and them with categories of convenience, such as Spanish speakers or English speakers, or ESL, or SPSS or whatever category you want to use to define these populations, or marginal populations, or poverty, a culture of poverty. Any of these defining—and by the way these are not bad people trying to do this. They're caught up within an academic dynamic in which they want to improve the lot of these populations, but in categorizing populations in the way in which they do, they reduce them to non-historical beings. And the contribution that we have made is the countervailence to that across the board. So we don't always attend only to anthropology, only to sociology, only to demography, only to applied mathematics, so on and so on and so on. You have to take a look, you have to consider the complexity of the systems in which populations are engaged over time, and that's what we do.

02-01:58:55

Holmes:

In looking at the rise of Ethnic Studies departments, as well as Chicana and Chicano Studies departments, we have two different models; yours is a third model. In your experience, how do you see the relationships of these departments in the larger university?

02-01:58:14

Vélez-Ibáñez:

Avoidance, mostly avoidance. Whenever you have scholars who are in African American Studies generally, and they are pretty well standalone and you have Chicana and Chicano, Latina and Latino Studies, fairly well established and standalone, their relationships are always very positive, very

supportive. When they're amalgamated, that's where real divisions and real conflict emerges, in a way, the populations are fettered again, to be reduced to a type, Ethnic Studies. That's the legitimacy of the identity of the population, Ethnic Studies? Horse-pucky. Or even worse, get lost in American Studies? Now how colonialist can you get? I don't see American Studies in South America, I see American Studies being taught in South America, about Americans. [laughter] See? And so I have a real problem with that, I have a real problem with it because what you're doing is again, you're siloing populations in the very way that the social sciences do, silo populations, ahistoricize them, and that's what happens with Ethic Studies, that's what happens with American Studies, silos.

02-02:01:10

Holmes:

I also wanted to ask, in reflecting on activism in the field of Chicana and Chicano Studies, and this was obviously a very important role in the field's development. What are your observations on how activism has continued in the field, and also, it being a source of tension among colleagues or even administration.

02-02:01:39

Vélez-Ibáñez:

I can tell you about our younger faculty here. Our younger faculty are activists and they have chosen their activism according to their best knowledge of how to be active, so that we have a wonderful scholar here in public health who in fact creates alternative narratives about public health, about this population constantly, and gets his word out there and plugs into networks of influence. What this younger faculty have is an uncanny ability to connect with others like themselves, that we didn't have. We still have to pick up the telephone or whatever. These kids are using social media to enhance their positions and their activism constantly, and so I'm very proud to be in their presence, because they're doing stuff different from what I do but they're doing it really, really well, because they're so sharp, they're so smart, they're so well trained and they have this Chicano, Chicana premise. It doesn't have to be articulated in writing but they have it because of what they do, not because of what people think they do. I'm very proud of them, I can't be happier, I really can't. They're three, four, five notches above what I do in many ways, as it should be, and I learn from them constantly. I still have to publish my stuff in books and all that. They're out there publishing their stuff all right in different mediums and forms and architectures, because they have to survive in an institution, but they're also impacting how we study, what we study, and what that means on how we study and what that means in terms of turning things around for the populations with whom they're working. I'm very proud of them, very proud of them.

02-0203:46

Holmes:

Let's talk a little bit about your observations on the future of the field. What are your thoughts on some of the needed changes or different directions you would like to see in the field?

02-02:04:11

Vélez-Ibáñez: Well it's not anything I can predefine, not really. I marvel at how the new scholars, and I include people like Luis Alvarez, for example, at UCSD, whose father Roberto Alvarez, wrote a wonderful book, *La Familia*, was an anthropologist, but Luis is a historian. Or Gabriela Soto Laveaga at Harvard now, she was at University of California Santa Barbara who has written marvelous stuff on Mexico. Right next door, we have a young man, Brendan O'Connor, of our faculty who is an anthropological linguist, another person in public health, another person in music and communication. All of these younger scholars continued and will make greater impact in many ways than my generation will, one from the knowledge base, because they're more efficient in getting their work out, they're more efficient in their techniques and methodology, and they have broader networks of communication than we did. So their impact, I think is going to be much more generative than ours, so I have a great deal of confidence in the changes that they're making, which has to do really with being much more efficient in locating problems and then solving them than we were, much more efficient, and they're unafraid. They are just unafraid, they don't—getting back to my favorite comment, "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn," that's their attitude. I am what I am, I am going to work in a diligent, respectful and scholarly manner, but I'm going to have an impact on what I do past me, but they're going to do it much more—and they're doing it much more efficiently than I can, and they're much better at it. They're not going to make the same mistakes I made, and having to kick myself in the butt all the time, constantly.

02-02:06:44

Holmes: In regards to a home within the academy, do you think that the School of Transborder Studies is not only a success, but do you think that may offer a model in some respects, for maybe other universities?

02-02:07:02

Vélez-Ibáñez: Well, the fact of the matter is our impact has been so great that we are weaker than we were five years ago. We're weaker than we were five years ago because we haven't been able to recruit as many faculty as we would like to for our business as other departments have, because other departments now have picked up and have come to understand the necessity, the imperative necessity of Latina and Latino, and Chicana and Chicano scholars in their fields, and so in a way not unlike what General Motors had to go through, in competing between Chevrolet, Cadillac and other parts of General Motors, we've weakened ourselves in being so successful, and so we have got to get our act together for the next generation of what we are, and that's one of the reasons it's going to be important in the selection of the next permanent director, because we're recruiting right now, for a director of the school. We have already, Dr. Irasema Coronado who is a blessing.

02-02:08:22

Holmes: We'll keep our fingers crossed.

02-02:08:24

Vélez-Ibáñez: Because within the foreseeable future, I'm out the door, and one of the things that you have to learn and recognize when you do this stuff long enough, is that the minute you walk out the door, you're forgotten. The only thing you leave is your books and your little bit of influence here and there, but frankly, the next generation has to take over, they can't be relying on you to intercede or to be the linebacker on this and that. So, I have to make sure, we have to make sure, that the next director that comes in has not only a fundamental understanding of what we do but of where we should be going, because we're in competition now with almost everybody else now, for what we do. We've got immigration specialists now in political sciences, we have immigration specialists now in sociology, we have immigration specialists now in anthropology, that's stuff that we only used to do, now everybody else has got one. [laughter] And so in a way, if you don't want to become extinct, we'd better generate some different ways of doing stuff.

02-02:09:35

Holmes: You're a victim of your own success.

02-02:09:36

Vélez-Ibáñez: Yes, that's exactly correct.

02-02:09:41

Holmes: Well, here to wrap up, we all stand on the shoulders of other scholars and these scholars that were so important to the field, unfortunately had passed by the time we began this project. Is there any scholars that you would like to remember and acknowledge here, that have passed, that you found influential to the field?

02-02:10:10

Vélez-Ibáñez: Dave Weber for sure. Dave Weber was very influential in having me understand the complexity of the Spanish empire, there's no doubt about it, and also to historicize stuff. So Dave has been very important. Another important person was Eric Wolf. Eric Wolf was for me, a giant theoretically and methodologically, on how to do stuff. But those two probably are the most important. In terms of my contemporaries, Roberto Alvarez certainly, Pat Zavella, Luis Plascencia, Renato Rosaldo also was important, and my dear colleague, Diego Vigil all of these people were and continue to be very important for my own work, and then of course the younger scholars that are coming in, like this kid next door, Luis Alvarez at UCSD and other scholars, younger anthropologists, a young man by the name of Alex Chavez, who is at Notre Dame, a brilliant, brilliant young man. As a matter of fact, he received the award from the American Association of Latina/Latino Anthropologists, for his book, and I got honorable mention. So it just pleased me to no freaking end, that this young guy, Alex Chavez, came in first and I came in second, and I couldn't have been happier, because what that told me was here is now the transition to the next generation.



02-02:12:00

Holmes: Well, Carlos, do you have any final thoughts?

02-02:12:04

Vélez-Ibáñez: No. [laughter]

02-02:12:04

Holmes: No. [laughter] Well thank you so much for your time today.

02-02:12:07

Vélez-Ibáñez: You're very welcome.

02-02:12:09

Holmes: All right, take care.

[End of Interview]