

Rudy Acuña

Rudy Acuña: Reflections on a Career in Chicana/o Studies

Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Todd Holmes
in 2018

This interview was made possible by the generous support of the California State University
Chancellor's Office.

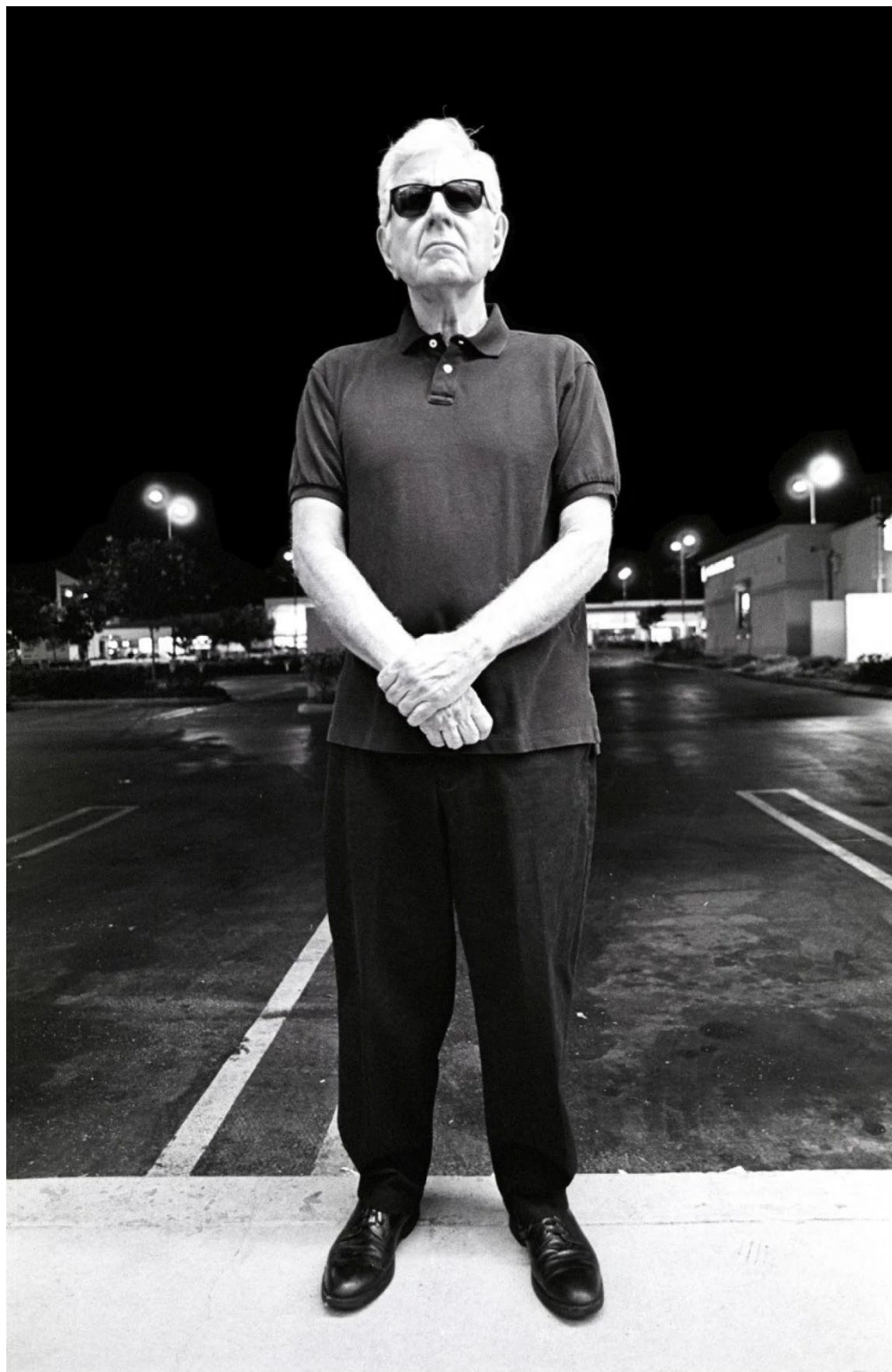
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Rudy Acuña, "Rudy Acuña: Reflections on a Career in Chicana/o Studies" conducted by Todd Holmes in 2018. Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2022.



Rodolfo "Rudy" Acuña (Photo courtesy of Harry Gamboa Jr.)

Abstract

Rodolfo "Rudy" Acuña is professor emeritus of Chicana/o studies at California State University, Northridge. Born and raised in the Boyle Heights community of East Los Angeles, Professor Acuña received his PhD in history from the University of Southern California. A fierce advocate for many causes within the Chicano Movement, he foremost saw himself as a teacher and educator—a career he began at San Fernando Junior High and Cleveland High School. In 1964, he joined the faculty of Pierce Community College, where he would develop some of the earliest curriculum for the field of Chicana/o studies. Five years later, he would serve as founding chair for the Department of Chicano Studies at California State University, Northridge, which continues to rank as the largest Chicana/o studies department in the United States. He is the author of numerous publications in the field, most notably *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (1972), a foundational text that is currently in its ninth edition. Other publications include: *Community Under Siege: A Chronicle of Chicanos East of the Los Angeles River, 1945-75* (1984); *Anything But Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles* (1996); and *Corridors of Migration: Odyssey of Mexican Laborers, 1600-1933* (2007). In this interview, Professor Acuña discusses: his family background and upbringing in Southern California; his educational journey from high school and California State University, Los Angeles to graduate school at the University of Southern California; his development as a teacher; his role in the formation of Chicana/o studies at both Pierce College and California State University, Northridge; his reflections on how the field of Chicana/o studies evolved over the decades; the aims and contributions of his scholarship in the field; the reception of Chicana/o studies by the academic profession; as well as his thoughts on important works and developments in the field 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: March 1, 2018

01-00:00:03

Holmes:

All right. This is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is March 1, 2018, and I have the pleasure of sitting down with Rudy Acuña for the Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project. We are here at his office in the Chicana/o Studies Department at Cal State, Northridge. Rudy, thanks so much for taking the time to sit with me today. I'd like to start off here in this interview talking a little bit about your family and background before we move into your career and scholarship and experience with the development of Chicano studies.

01-00:00:42

Acuña:

Okay. Well, nothing extraordinary. Was son of immigrants. My father is from Jalisco, my mother is from Sonora. My father was a tailor, a very good tailor, and he probably had a life of his own and a profession of his own. However, he never broke out of that because of the language difference, and because he was a very bad businessman. But he was a role model. My mother, I was raised mostly with her family. They were from Sonora. At that time, very influential on me was that we had a very large extended family, and we had friends. At that time, we didn't have motels, or there were motels, but we didn't go to them, and if we had a vacation or anything, it was the living room floor of a relative or a friend. And we would go into the Riverside area; we would go all over East Los Angeles; so you really got that sense of community there. And so, I kind of remember that, and that had an awful lot of influence.

I was said to be "mentally retarded"—some people said that was a good diagnosis but I don't know. The thing is that, in the first grade, I couldn't speak English. So my mother pulled me out because she said, "He's not mentally retarded." My mother who was blind, legally blind, had a real strong sense of education. She used to have a great big magnifying glass, and used it to read and taught herself how to read. But she pulled me out of school and sent me to live with my grandparents, which was good and bad because it did give me a feeling of alienation. So I went then to Saint Agnes, which was a parochial school. They taught me how to speak English, and then I was "not mentally retarded!" And so that had an impact upon me.

Parochial schools had an impact on me, because it gives you a certain arrogance. You're part of the elect, you know. And so, consequently, Loyola [High School] was a major influence, because of the academics. I think that, for example, Latin helped me think, but it also was a pathway to go to the university, to think about the university, because none of my family had ever gone to a university. We didn't know what it was. And so consequently, you don't learn about that, but you learned about it at school. You learned about it through the aspirations of many of your fellow students, and like I said, they

were divided into Irish, Italian, and Mexican. They were all immigrants there, in the parochial schools.

01-00:04:20

Holmes: Did you have any siblings?

01-00:04:22

Acuña: Yeah, I had a sister. My sister was a cosmetologist, beauty operator. She only went through the tenth grade, and she used to say, "Oh, my brother was the preferred." And I said, "No, you were," and then she would say, "Well, you went on to school." And then, she'd come up another, said, "Well, because you were lighter," and I said, "That's true," and that was probably one of the reasons, because she was darker; she was markedly Mexican. And so, then we went into the real reasons: first, she was much better looking than I was; and second, she was a good dancer. I was neither. [laughter]

So, you know, my cousin was my best friend, always got me out of trouble because he was a good fighter. I was not that good. And I have cousins today who are very successful—one of them became superintendent of the LA City Schools—but I have more cousins who are in prison, and members of the mafia. So consequently, again, it's just the story of a Mexican family. We're all mixed up, you know.

01-00:05:58

Holmes: Now you were born in Boyle Heights, but as you were saying yesterday, you moved around the LA area quite a bit. Can you discuss your impressions or recollections of the neighborhoods and communities that you grew up in?

01-00:06:15

Acuña: Well, not very much of Boyle Heights because I was very young. South Central, I do. It was around Normandie and Jefferson. I remember the houses. I just remember that most of the people around were relatives, because you tended to move to places where your relatives were. I guess the babysitters were cheaper there. And so, we would move around there. In East Hollywood it was like the story almost of a New York ghetto, where you had all kinds of minorities there. Yeah, you had the Italians who were known as the Wops; the Irish were known as the Micks; and the Mexicans—they called us an awful lot of things. But the thing is, you had different people, and in a way, the same thing in Boyle Heights, you had different groups, and that was good because you fought, and you'd call each other names, but you cohabited, you see. You cohabited.

I remember LA really well because we would always take the yellow streetcar into downtown LA. We'd go over there and get a haircut, or we would go there to the movies. My grandmother used to love the *variedades*, that was the variety shows, and so we'd go in there, and you saw an awful lot of movement. I remember my aunts would go in there, and they would take a pad, and they would go window shopping, and they saw a dress, they would

draw the dress and everything then they would come home and they would draw a pattern, and make the dress. A dress that cost five dollars, they could make it for fifty cents.

01-00:08:28

Holmes: Oh, wow.

01-00:08:29

Acuña: And so, you know, you had an awful lot of that there. My aunts worked in the garment industry. I don't remember an awful lot of poverty, because my father, during the Depression, had a job. The only thing I remember was that we always had people sleeping in our garage. We had people coming in; they would come in from Nogales or Tucson and say, "Hey, the *comadre* sent me; they said you'd put me up for a couple of days." And, they were there; we would just make an awful lot of soup, because my mother and my grandmother used to feed an awful lot of people.

01-00:09:11

Holmes: Do you remember the Los Angeles area during the World War II period? The uprisings, such as the Zoot Suit Riots or Sleepy Lagoon?

01-00:09:25

Acuña: Yeah, but I was too young to really be affected an awful lot. I do remember also though the class divisions, because in Los Angeles, you had an awful lot of the political exiles come in, like Adolfo de la Huerta, and you had the different factions come in here. Like part of my parents' friends were the la Huerta's people, but on the same side you had the Kosterlitzkys, and the Kosterlitzkys were relatives of Emilio Kosterlitzky who was the head of the Federales under Díaz in the Sonora area. So you had different groups, but here they kind of coexisted. But then they did form groups, like they had Las Damitas Catolicas; they had the Black and White Ball. So there was a middle class here, too, and you were exposed to that, you see. We were exposed to the poverty but not everybody was poor. There was this cross section of classes there, and you remember it as a kid, you know.

01-00:10:44

Holmes: Talk a little bit about your high school years, and growing up. Did you go to a Catholic high school?

01-00:10:54

Acuña: Yeah, Loyola High. Loyola was a Jesuit high school. Before that I went to parochial school. In the parochial school, we happened to be the Catholic Youth Organization's football champions, and that was one of the reasons that we were recruited, because I was on the team at that particular time.

01-00:11:17

Holmes: So you played football in high school?

01-00:11:19

Acuña:

No, not in high school. Yeah, in high school, it was a mess because my cousin went to Loyola, and then he dropped out because, I mean, he was a fantastic ball player, but, he was just spoiled and didn't stay there. And so when he left, I mean, my world left, because then I would hang out with the people from Loyola, but then I would hang out with the people from Poly High School, which was there on Washington Boulevard and Grand, more in South Central. And so I would go there because there was an awful lot of friends. We could get some booze. You could also, once in a while, get some *mota* [marijuana], and so it was just a different environment.

01-00:12:14

Holmes:

Now, we know that you became very active in the community during your early adult years, and throughout the rest of your life. Do you recall any of the early political mobilization within the community?

01-00:12:31

Acuña:

Well, first of all, I went to the Army, and the Korean War, overseas. At that time, I was going to go to Trieste, because there were some problems there. They abruptly ended the Korean War, which I wish I would have known, because then I wouldn't have gone into the Army. I volunteered for the draft. But, that had an awful lot to do with my development, the Army, because hey, you became a lot more independent.

There was an awful lot of race riots. I remember they made me a company clerk, because my scores were the highest in the battalion. But, Jesus, I would go out, and like, for example, one time I was there, I was the clerk on a general court-martial. The major who was going to try the case walked in, and a guy named—I forget. He had an Irish name. Hartzog was his name—he asked, "The defendant, what is he?" Meaning, what race is he? And the captain, Captain Roderick, said, "Well, he's black," and his response was: "Hang the guilty son of a bitch." So I saw that, the racism within that area. Also when you went out into the streets, you had your nightclubs. You had all black nightclubs; you had all white nightclubs; and you had then nightclubs of hillbillies, you see. And so you had all of this antagonism there.

01-00:14:32

Holmes:

And where was this, what city?

01-00:14:35

Acuña:

This was in Augsburg, Germany.

01-00:14:36

Holmes:

Oh, okay, interesting.

01-00:14:37

Acuña:

And so, you really had race riots there, and one time, they came in; they started beating up everybody in our barracks, and to the point that I had to pick up a shovel and hit a guy in the head, and the shovel broke. And so he

kept on coming at me so I had to shoot him. I was a bad shot, so I [laughs] hit him in the shoulder, but stopped him! But I mean, these guys were bad. The ones I got along with in the Army were, again, Italians, Polacks—there was an awful lot of Polacks there, because they were very poor, the Polacks—and the Puerto Ricans. The Puerto Ricans saved my bacon a lot of times. So that had an awful lot of impact—I mean, it made me grow up. I didn't see this kind of interaction at home.

01-00:15:43

Holmes: And what years were you in the military?

01-00:15:47

Acuña: 1953 to '55. Then I came back, and I got married when I was over there, and my father's thing was, "You played, you paid." You didn't leave kids any place. You got married, and you came back; you made a family, and I had to start to work. I worked about fifty, sixty hours a week, and I carried sixteen units to go to school. And so, it was a chore.

01-00:16:30

Holmes: Where did you work?

01-00:16:33

Acuña: I worked different jobs. I was an insurance inspector at one time. You go out, verifying addresses, et cetera. I was a janitor, and that was the best job I had, because it allowed me to do some studying on the job, because my shift was generally from about 5:00pm to about 2:00 in the morning.

01-00:17:00

Holmes: And you were going to school at Cal State, LA?

01-00:17:06

Acuña: LA State, yeah.

01-00:17:06

Holmes: Did you immediately major in history?

01-00:17:13

Acuña: Well I had been a major in history because I had gone before to Loyola University, and I had gone to USC before I went in.

01-00:17:23

Holmes: Oh really? Well talk about those experiences. Did you go straight from high school into those universities?

01-00:17:29

Acuña: To Loyola, yeah. Ah, you were just surviving. I was not really interested in school at that particular time. I think that probably the biggest influence at Loyola was a man by the name of Frank Sullivan. He was an English professor who was investigated by the McCarthy hearings, and he was a Socialist, but the Jesuits pretty much shielded him, and he had a big influence

on me. Some of the others did. They would make you take epistemology. It was mostly the curriculum that you took. Then at USC, I had one good professor; Russell Crawford, I think his name was. I forget now. But he was also an influence.

But at USC, there was some bad experiences, because there was an awful lot of drinking. You'd only go to the parties that the fraternities had if you wanted a free drink. And when I got there one time they wanted to pledge me. I think it was SigEps; they wanted to pledge me, and I came. He says, "Well, what are you?" I said, "Mexican." He said, "Oh no, you're Spanish. You have gray eyes." And I said, "No, I'm Mexican." That just turned me off. Turned me off to Greeks too. So after that, I didn't want anything to do with them. But to the point then, my sister got married, and the '53 recession came on, and I decided I'm not going to be a burden on my parents, so I went into the Army. I was going to go to Korea, but just a month after that, the armistice was signed, so I was stuck.

01-00:19:42

Holmes:

Well, discuss your undergraduate experience at LA State.

01-00:19:49

Acuña:

Well, it was varied. You'd go in and out. I would get to school around 6:00 in the morning, go in, get a big cup of coffee and a cinnamon roll—at that time, they used to make big cinnamon rolls—and, I would sit there. I would go then to the car, go to sleep for an hour, then go to my first class. And, I just went, one class after the other. I mean, it was just like, you didn't care about your grades. The only grades I cared about were in history. That was what was driving me. I liked history. So I would go to the history classes.

I remember one fellow student, Ray Chavira, and he would come in, and he always looked like he was tired, and, he told me his life story and his life story affected me. He told me that he was a bastard child, and that he would get up, since he was twelve years old, he would get up at 2:00 in the morning and go out and work for an Armenian trash collector. And he says, he always felt like he smelled. But he got into the habit of picking books out of the trash, and one time he picked out the *Communist Manifesto*, and he read it and he's talking about the chains, and the enslavement. He says, "That's me," and he became a member of the Socialist Workers Party, I remember. That one experience told me something that is important; that education was important.

And so, at that time too, I remember that you majored in history, but you also were a social studies major, because social studies, you had to teach them in the schools, so that's when I went into education. I thought I would be in education for a couple of years and then leave, because I didn't want to make that my life's living, you know, but, it was fast. Because of the previous education I had, I could do it in a year and a half, then I could go on, and get my credential, and get a full-time job, you see.

01-00:22:56

Holmes:

I do want to talk about the credential, and you starting what became a very long and decorated teaching career. But before we get to that I had a question about the curriculum of the history classes you were taking at Cal State, LA. This was probably well before we begin to diversify, say, US history, as we know it today.

01-00:23:22

Acuña:

Well, it was just a straight history, very conservative history. I mean, Western history was "How the West Was Won;" Frederick Jackson Turner. It was just very standard, very conservative. The only relief was European history, because it was a little bit more complex, and they were a little bit more objective in teaching that. I got into Latin America with Louis De Armond, who was one of the few Socialist professors at the school, and Louis got me hooked on that. I mean, he was not the greatest teacher, but he made things interesting. He used to talk about his stay in Peru, and how he used to drink these pisco sours. [laughter] And so, that was a trivial thing; it was a relief.

01-00:24:14

Holmes:

Well you graduated with your BA in history in 1957?

01-00:24:19

Acuña:

In social studies.

01-00:24:20

Holmes:

In social studies. And then, you went immediately into the credential program?

01-00:24:26

Acuña:

No, I went into the credential program and also the master's program.

01-00:24:29

Holmes:

Oh, and the master's program. As you were saying, the initial inspiration to go into education was just, you liked history and you thought you could do it for a few years?

01-00:24:43

Acuña:

Well, it was economic. Remember, I had a kid, and then another kid. I mean, you had to feed them.

01-00:24:57

Holmes:

What was the curriculum of the credential program like?

01-00:25:03

Acuña:

At that time, it was mostly undergraduate. It was woven in, like the same thing that we have today.

01-00:25:13

Holmes:

And then, your first position, because you got your credential in 1958, was at San Fernando Junior High?

01-00:25:24

Acuña:

No, my first job was in a yeshiva. It was West Coast Talmudical Society, and I taught there for two years, and I taught, in one little classroom, I taught K through twelve, and I taught the social studies in that class. I used to even have to wear a yarmulke. And the kids were ultra-orthodox there. I used to go in there and on Saturdays, because they used to tell me, "We're going to have a ballgame, but we can't put it on." So I lived close to West Coast at that time. It was a drive-in. I'd put on the TV for them to watch the ballgame. So I mean, it was a good experience. Also taught me about Orthodox Jews versus conservative Jews, and liberals, and how there was that interplay. They didn't like each other. But, it also taught me about kids.

01-00:26:34

Holmes:

Then after that you moved to San Fernando Junior High?

01-00:26:40

Acuña:

Yeah.

01-00:26:41

Holmes:

And that reminds me, while you grew up largely in LA, or the surrounding areas of LA proper, you eventually moved up to the San Fernando Valley.

01-00:26:54

Acuña:

Oh, I moved in '55, because I had a GI Bill, and so I could buy a house. You couldn't buy houses in LA on the GI Bill. They were too old, and then, the policy was to push it for developers in the San Fernando Valley. Well, my first house cost me \$8,000, and I got a low interest rate because of the Cal Vet, and so consequently, it was because of housing, you see. That was one of the reasons why I moved out to the valley. Also because we'd take the, when I was a kid, the red streetcar, and we'd go in to San Fernando, and we would go out there to see relatives. We had relatives. One relative was a chief of police out there. And so, we'd go out there and we'd visit the relatives.

I remember going through Pacoima, and my grandmother would tell me, "*Aquí de viven los Mexicanos malos*," this is where the bad Mexicans live; when we would get into San Fernando, "*Aquí de viven los Mexicanos Buenos*," [this is where the good Mexicans live]. Well, what it was is that the "Mexicanos malos" from Pacoima, were mostly from Jalisco. The "Mexicanos buenos" were from Sonora where my grandmother was from. I mean, you know, the regionalism there, it was a tremendous thing. And when you'd get in there, streets, they didn't have any pavement, et cetera. You could really see the poverty there. Literally in San Fernando, the whites lived that side of the railroad tracks, and Mexicans lived this side of the railroad tracks, which we would call the East and West, but the thing is that it was a different town, so you learned those towns.

01-00:29:10

Holmes:

What was your experience like teaching at the junior high?

01-00:29:14

Acuña:

Well, there's where I learned, if I had any success in Chicano studies, it was in the junior high school. When I got there, as I mentioned, I was shit. I'd get in there, and I'd expect the students to respond to me. But by this time, I'm reading John Dewey, et cetera, and I was fortunate that I had a junior high principal, guy by the name of Hugh Hodgens, who was a Methodist, Protestant, and a Republican, but very good. One time I was going to swat a kid. If they did this behavior, you swat them. And well, he told me, he says, "Hey, before you swat them," he says, "let me show you something after school." So after school, he took me up to the cave where the kid lived. I didn't know the kid lived there, but he took me into the cave, and he said, "What were you going to swat him for?" I says, "For stealing lunches." He said, "This is where he was bringing the lunches." I felt like shit. I almost started crying. But then I started to pay attention to him, that there was a reason why he was doing what he was doing.

When I got to the junior high school, there must've been two dozen fights a semester. Within two years, there was only one fight! And how did he [Hugh Hodgens] change it? He used to make us, all of the teachers, stand in front of the classroom, and say good morning to the students. That was all. As they came in, "Good morning. Good morning. Hi, glad to see you." Boom. Within two years, I mean, it was a different school. He told me, he says, "They have to like you to come to class and to succeed." Well, I learned that lesson, you see. I wasn't the same person when I left there that I was when I got there, because I listened. And so that was part of my education.

01-00:31:52

Holmes:

Well, from there, you went to Cleveland High School?

01-00:31:55

Acuña:

Cleveland High School, and I got recruited there because there was a man named Bill Farmer. He was a principal, and he was one of the few principals that liked Mexicans, and he had more Mexicans in his school at that time—they didn't have that many Mexican students in any other school—because he would go out and recruit them. And he recruited me, so I went there, and it was another experience. It was another experience.

01-00:32:27

Holmes:

And, in these classrooms as you're teaching social studies, did you begin to experiment and try to diversify the curriculum, rather than, say, the conservative standard—

01-00:32:42

Acuña:

Well, look, at this particular time, I relied an awful lot on personality, communicating with the students, getting into topics, controversial topics. I still get on Facebook, and I got an invitation last year to the 1965 Class of Cleveland High School. There, I was going to be the special guest. They remembered me! And they remember me because I would talk about

controversial things. I would talk against the [Vietnam] War, because I mean, I wasn't very popular with the other professors. Most of them would get up, when I would go into the cafeteria, and leave, because I was against the war. At that time, you were marked as a Communist. You weren't, but you were still marked as a Communist. Well, then I became the mentor for the chess club. And so I'd get all of the nerds there, and I would tell them about the Vietnam War, et cetera, so we had an anti-Vietnam group. So it was a different thing. It was more personality. It was more issue oriented than curriculum oriented. It was more teaching, you see. I was just zeroing in on teaching.

01-00:34:29

Holmes:

Well then, by 1962, you also earned your master's degree.

01-00:34:34

Acuña:

Yeah.

01-00:34:35

Holmes:

Was that in history?

01-00:34:36

Acuña:

In history.

01-00:34:37

Holmes:

I know I read someplace that you had an academic counselor who advised you to teach Spanish.

01-00:34:46

Acuña:

Teach Spanish and also go into education, because my people went into those fields. He says, "Your people don't go into that field," just saying that it was harder to get history jobs than it would be one in education or one in Spanish.

01-00:35:30

Holmes:

What inspired you to get a master's degree in history?

01-00:35:34

Acuña:

A master's, the GI Bill. I needed the money. The classes, it was a better way of earning money than going out and digging a ditch or doing some other type of work. So I would draw the GI Bill.

01-00:35:56

Holmes:

And what was your experience in the master's program?

01-00:36:01

Acuña:

It was fairly good.

01-00:36:02

Holmes:

Were there faculty and advisors that played an important role in your education there?

01-00:36:08

Acuña:

There were some very good lecturers, but they were not very politically motivating. Had one that drove in from Santa Barbara to teach a class over there, and, he was a damned good lecturer, but he was not a—you know, it was hello and goodbye, that type of relationship.

01-00:36:35

Holmes:

And, did you write a thesis for your master's work?

01-00:36:40

Acuña:

No, I took an exam. Then I transitioned right away. I transitioned, because I went to an NDA institute. At that time, they were going to the audio-lingual method in teaching of Spanish, and I saw an advertising and it said that they were taking people to go to this institute at USC, and, they would pay you a nice stipend, and they would also pay for you to stay there during the summertime. It was an eight-weeks institute. So I applied for and got it, and I started meeting professors there that says, "Hey, why don't you go into a PhD program?"

I met a guy by the name of Manuel Servin. He was a history professor, conservative but a good guy, and we hit it off really well, and we used to go drinking together. And then he used to have a great, big cigar that he would smoke. He would say about sociology, "Don't go into sociology. You see, you can learn that at any street corner." That was his attitude; it was pure, history. But he was also the editor of the *California Historical Review*, and the only Mexican I knew with a PhD. And he talked me in because he was going to start a new program called Latin American studies, and he said, "Hey, you come in to this?" And I says, "Yeah, but I already have all of my American history. It would be easier for me to go into that than to go into Latin American." He said, "But you're not going to learn as much. Here, you go into language, you go into the literature, you go into history, you go into political science, et cetera."

So, I enrolled and did it there because you know, USC, the bulk of their classes were after four o'clock. This meant that I would finish teaching and I could go and take my classes, you see. And so, that's why I went there. I went there too because of the approach. Donald Rowland was a Berkeley PhD, worked under Bolton. He was a Bolton scholar, and that made him special. Didn't publish very much, but he was a Bolton scholar, you see. Then, I had in the Spanish department, I had some good literature people, Serrano Plaja, who was a Spaniard, who was an anarchist, and then I had Ramón Sender, who was a Republican. They would come in; they were in the same department; they wouldn't talk to each other, you see, because they were different politically. That got me into a lot of the Spanish Civil War, you see. I had a bad guy by the name of [Paul E.] Hadley. He was one of the heads of international relations, very well known. He was probably a CIA agent because he had an attaché in Buenos Aires. Well this guy, Hadley, was on my dissertation committee. When I did my dissertation, the defense—no, not the

defense, my qualifying exams—I wrote them, and he read them, and according to Servin, he said that when they discussed my exams, he says that he wanted to fail me. And Servin said, "We thought that was a very good paper, so why fail him?" And Hadley says, "Well, I think he's arrogant, and we should teach him some humility."

Well Servin being Servin—he was probably drunk—he said, "Well you know what? I didn't know this was a fraternity." He said, "I have three of your students, and I think I should fail them too, because I think we should teach them humility." Well, Hadley backed down. However, instead of getting honors, I just got a pass, because of Hadley. So you had that type of thing. Now probably, it was not a racial thing with him. It was probably political, because by this time, I'm very active in the antiwar movement.

01-00:42:05

Holmes:

What was the environment like there at USC? Because a lot of times, people can look at USC and it may have the stereotype amongst some as a bastion of white privilege, and certainly even during this time.

01-00:42:17

Acuña:

Well it is. It is. At that time, less, because we had a lot more Korean vets coming back. You had less than that. Also, the tuition was about \$25 a unit, so it was an awful lot less. Today, it's incredible. And also, there's gentrification and other things; they've built up an empire there. It has a monopoly on education there. I mean, the lawyers, it has most of the judges; you have in the field of government, et cetera, it's heavy with USC graduates. So it's become a different school. And I think that they cultivate the whiteness thing. I think that they resent the blacks and the Mexicans and the Central Americans that are in their particular sphere of influence.

But remember, I was a night school student. I'd like to point that out, that I didn't get my PhD through normal channels. I was not a full-time student. When I went over to an interview at UCLA, with their classes, they didn't have any classes after four o'clock. And so one of the first things the professor told me, he says, "If you want to come here, are you going to stop working, as a high school teacher?" And I said, "No, I have to support a family." He said, "Well, you're not going to be able to take any classes. We don't have any classes after four o'clock." Also, he says, "We want a full-time student. We want a student to be here." They want to be able to socialize you. Then, too, I would have had to drive out from San Fernando Valley to UCLA, and there was no freeway going at that particular time. So there were an awful lot of impediments. USC was a lot less elitist than UCLA was.

01-00:45:03

Holmes:

Interesting. Now, what year did you start teaching at the junior college, Los Angeles Pierce College?

01-00:45:12

Acuña: 1964. And at that time, it was very competitive. We had about 3,000 teachers taking the exam. They were mostly high school teachers, and they would take an exam in political science and in history, and then they would rank you. I ranked number seven. You're taking your exam, then you went into the openings.

01-00:45:42

Holmes: Yeah, because that junior college system, I think expanded dramatically right after World War II.

01-00:45:47

Acuña: Yeah, but this was fairly well established by that time.

01-00:45:50

Holmes: Yeah, yeah. And, what was the environment like there at Pierce College?

01-00:45:57

Acuña: First class; it was great. It was a party. They had a Charlie Brown's up there so you'd always go after class. They had a dairy on campus. Didn't have very many Mexican kids at that time. I started to bring in some of the first Mexican kids there. In fact, when I went over to Dominguez Hills, at Pierce College, the president at that time, [Marie] Martin, wanted to keep me there. She offered me a boost in pay, and then she offered me to only teach one class a week, and they would put it on tape, and then I would go around to the different campuses to answer questions on Mexican American history.

01-00:46:46

Holmes: And was it there at Pierce College that you began to craft your first classes in Mexican American history?

01-00:46:53

Acuña: Well, I started to think about them, yeah. The first class I started to teach in about 1965, 1966, was at Mount Saint Mary's College, and I started to teach a class on Mexican Americans. And so I taught there. Also taught a class part-time at USC in political science on Mexican Americans. And at that time, we were also doing workshops on Mexican American history, on pedagogy, so I started to give pedagogy an awful lot of thought about that time. So, you see, it was something that I don't think that people could do today. You were just always on the go. You were always on the hustle.

01-00:47:48

Holmes: Well, let's talk a little bit about the state of Mexican American history or what would become known later as Chicana/o studies. In many respects, that area was just really in the early stages of taking shape, and then you were certainly at the forefront of putting together that curriculum. Were there works that you drew from which were inspiring? Works by some of the early pioneers?

01-00:48:20

Acuña:

You know, again, my inspiration came from people like C. Wright Mills, William Appleman Williams, these people. It was the knowledge that I got that I molded into some of their ideas. It wasn't something that I was reinventing. Also remember, I had an awful lot of history of the West, the Southwest, so I knew the authors. I knew what was wrong with them and what was right with them. Also too, I'm an American historian, now with my master's in US history, then I'm going into Latin American, so I'm molding them. So the natural kind of molding that this is going to produce is a hybrid.

01-00:49:20

Holmes:

It's really interesting that you say that, because as you were mentioning here just earlier, you found the European and Latin American history classes more objective than, say, how US history was taught.

01-00:49:37

Acuña:

Not the Latin American so much, but the European history—

01-00:49:41

Holmes:

Well were there works from Latin America that weren't on the radar for a lot of US historians that you found good or useful for putting together your classes?

01-00:49:51

Acuña:

Oh, most of them, you know what I mean? Now I can't even think of them. But you'd read most of the general histories at that time, like *Many Mexicos*, you know, [Leslie Byrd] Simpson's work. I found that very interesting, because this concept of many Mexicos that you start to get into. I found [Herbert Eugene] Bolton to be very interesting, because of this trans-border type of thing, the *History of the Americas*. In fact, when I developed the history of the Americas, I developed it out of a Bolton thesis. And so consequently, and in the community colleges, they were already teaching the history of the Americas. All right. My interpretation of history of the Americas is different, but it's a kind of a takeoff on it. It's kind of an evolution.

01-00:50:53

Holmes:

Now, if I'm remembering correctly, you stated one time that you had a lot of admiration for Ernesto Galarza, that out of those early pioneers, he was one that really stuck out to you.

01-00:51:06

Acuña:

Yeah, well Ernesto was thinking. He was thinking. He was not just translating. Most historians today, most Chicano historians, most Chicanos are translating. They're writing in translation. How in the hell would they know the sixties if they hadn't been through the sixties? No, they are translating. They're translating what other people are saying. So consequently, it's a little bit different, and so, Ernesto was not translating. He had been through all of those episodes. He had been through the Bracero Program. He had been through most of the things that he's writing about. When he's writing about Alviso,

[*Alviso: The Crisis of A Barrio* (1973)] this is the first one, he's talking about what? Gentrification.

And so consequently, I just liked that he was thinking, and I don't think that most people today think. They produce, they do research, but you're translating in research. And, this is what I really fear. I fear that people are going to take what I wrote and translate it. I don't want to be translated, and I think that this is what is happening.

01-00:52:32
Holmes:

You obviously read the works of, say, Carey McWilliams and Paul Taylor.

01-00:52:39
Acuña:

Well, Carey McWilliams, not so much his research, it's his language. This guy's a master at language, when he comes up with a fantasy heritage, when he comes up with these type of concepts. I mean, this is Carey McWilliams, and Carey McWilliams was the ultimate, at that time, activist. He was active in everything. He had his two cents in everything, and that was what made him so vital. Now what was the other one that you—

01-00:53:13
Holmes:

Paul Taylor.

01-00:53:14
Acuña:

Paul Taylor is writing about something new, something that he is writing down to be translated. I don't think that he had any particular commitment. In my interview, he referred to what Paul—no, what was his name, the head of the cotton strike—Pat Chambers, as, "Well what did he look like and what was he like?" "Well, he looked like a New York Jew." [laughs] That was racist. You know? That's racist. And I think that he didn't have any particular commitment, and I may be wrong, but I don't detect that in his work. But Carey McWilliams was committed.

01-00:54:19
Holmes:

By the 1950s, you also had those like George I. Sánchez and Américo Paredes.

01-00:54:24
Acuña:

George Sánchez was an activist. He was activist in everything. I think what really held him back is that he became a Protestant. And here I get this from Servin: he didn't like Protestants, [laughter] and so he would always rat on Protestants. This was what's wrong with them; they were Protestants. That fucked up to their mind, you know. [laughter] But this is the thing. I'd say it was. I do think though that Protestants, this gives you different perspective on things. It does remove you a little bit from that community, at that particular time in history. Today, no. But he was the ultimate what, scholar activist. I mean, you looked at his bibliographies, and his bibliographies are the cornerstone of Chicano studies, because here's where we get the first thing.

It was like the guy from USC, [Emory S.] Bogardus, and Bogardus's work is monumental. USC at one time—and they lost that after Bogardus left—they had the best sociological works coming out of their graduate department. They were doing the best type of snapshots of LA. If you're going to read LA history, you have to read the Bogardus school. And I think that those people did influence me, and I think they influenced me more because I'm a *metiche*. Metiche means that you're into everything. I just liked this. I liked Servin because I liked going, at that time, and drinking beer. I don't drink beer anymore. I used to like to go out and hear stories.

What was his name? This is what happens when you get older, you're not as fast on names. But he was one of the archivists over there in the Natural Museum of History in LA. Well, this guy was another character. He was a white dude who, if you wanted to know about the history of LA and you wanted a document, he would give it to you. But I remember Servin helped him break out of a hospital. He was in the hospital convalescing for being an alcoholic. He was going through some alcoholic episodes. And so, Servin helps him escape. It's almost like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. [laughter] And so, the ways Servin would describe it, you see, I liked that kind of shit.

01-00:57:34

Holmes:

Well, speaking of the movement, now it obviously played an important role in the development of the field.

01-00:57:43

Acuña:

On the field, yeah, but on the movement, no. The movement, most of my involvement is out of my community—

01-00:57:51

Holmes:

Well, I'd like to ask you, what were your connections and experience with both your community and different facets of activism?

01-00:57:59

Acuña:

Oh they were fairly good. I was a member of the Latin American Civic Association and also MAPA, Mexican American Political Association. In the Latin American Civic Association, I was fortunate to be in on the writing of the proposal for the first Head Start program here in the San Fernando Valley and in the United States, 1965. LACA had the largest Head Start program in the nation, and I was part of that. I was part of voter registration, and so I'm proud of those things. I'm more proud of them than I am of my antiwar, because I was not involved in the nuts and bolts there, where I was in that.

01-00:58:58

Holmes:

What do you recall from, say, the Farmworkers Movement?

01-00:59:03

Acuña:

The Farmworkers Movement was inspirational. I remember growing up there in '64, and I remember we met with Cesar Chavez, and Cesar at that time was not as known as he was later. He's down there and he was real pensive, and

we asked him what was wrong. He says, "Why, you know, I have to make a decision, whether I'm going to go with the farm workers, I'm going to put them in the AFL or stay apart." He said, "Most of the activists, the leftists want me to stay apart." He said, "But you know, look at those people out there. They have to eat." He says, "If they don't eat, I don't have a union, and," he says, "the strike will fail, and all of the sacrifices up to now, will go down the drain." I found Cesar to, you know, and I didn't always agree with him, but I found him to be one of the most intelligent men that I've ever known.

In the seventies, he used to call me up once in a while to go up to La Paz. He had a celebrity coming in or an educator coming in; he wanted other people to interact with them. Well, one time he called me up and I was going to go up there, loaded up on protein, and all the meat I could eat because they were vegetarians. I didn't want to get over there; I didn't want to eat that rabbit food. So I got up there, and much to my dismay, who was the person that was there, as the guest? Paulo Freire. I was in awe. Then, there was a dialogue between Paulo Freire and Cesar. At the end, Paulo turns to Cesar and goes, "The Praxis." That made me cry! "The Praxis" A brown man, with not very much education was the Praxis. That had an awful lot of influence on me. He would also talk about the collectives in Northern Spain, the collective farms that they had. Every time I got around him, he wanted to talk about that, he was obsessed with it.

The only thing is that people don't realize, number one, Cesar just came out of the labor movement. Number two, at that time, the immigrant population in the United States was not very big. In 1970, only a fifth of our people were immigrants. About 70 percent of them were probably second generation. Well, why did the issue then become different in the 1970s, '80s? Because the immigrant population started to grow. We started to get more immigrants than second generation in the United States. So consequently, then your issues are going to start to change. Now if Cesar would have been around, he would have changed with those times. Well, he didn't. People are a product of the time, just like Ernesto Galarza is the same way. He had the fortune that he had more of an education.

01-01:03:23

Holmes:

Well, speaking of education, as you point out in your book, *The Making of Chicano Studies*, one of the overlook facets when we think of activism has to actually do around education, and here I'm referring to Sal Castro and the LA Blowouts in March of '68, as well as other movements. What do you recall from those?

01-01:03:47

Acuña:

Well, I recall both. I was taking my dissertation defense, [laughs] remember that, at the same time; that's why I didn't go out and support, because I'm taking that.

01-01:04:09

Holmes: Well, what do you recall about the educational movement? And what was your involvement, if any?

01-01:04:16

Acuña: Well, the education movement, what they did, the students did, we were trying to do as a Mexican American movement prior to that. But we were petitioning; they were no longer petitioning. And they accomplished in those walkouts more than we did in the previous ten years, twenty years. Also though, my job here as a historian is that I have to get a broader perspective. It's not only the East LA Walkouts; it's also the Mexican American Youth Organization walkouts in Texas, because we forget about this, and José Ángel Gutiérrez always points it out to me. He says, "Hey, there's a certain amount of California Chicano imperialism," because we're imposing our history, and we're really not including the fact that, in Texas, a month after these blowouts, they had those blowouts, but then you have a real organization organizing them, and you have what? You have fifty blowouts in Texas. I mean, you don't find it in Chicano books! You see, because they don't go out of California, or they don't go out of this particular thing. It's always situational, where, I made it a point to try to go to other states to learn about other states, you see, learn about their movements, because when you're talking about Chicanos, you're not just talking about California. It's like here in California, at one time you had a history of the North, and a history of Southern California. And you have to integrate those. And this is where the organizer in me comes out. I want to organize everything.

01-01:06:20

Holmes: Well we also had student activism on the college campuses, and not just dealing with say, antiwar, but of really focusing on say, the union of Mexican American students, the Black Student Union, of advocating for curriculum change at the universities.

01-01:06:40

Acuña: Yeah, and I think that here we owe a tremendous debt to the Black movement, because an awful lot of what we learned at first was a following of the Black movement. We owe Chicano studies to the black blowouts on the campuses, because there was nothing like it. It was very exciting, the rhetoric that they used. Remember the black movement, student movement, has an awful lot more second-, third-, fourth-generation college students, where the Mexican American or the Chicano—this is their first generation. We don't have any older generations to back us up, and if we do have people, they're pretty well assimilated. They're either from Mexico from rich families, or they are apart, mostly intermarried, et cetera. But here you have them.

There's a difference, but that language created by the black movement has a tremendous, what, influence on Chicanos. When you start to hear some of the black activists rap, it's something. [laughs] It's poetic. It's poetic. They make up phrases; they make up the language as they go. And so, consequently, I

think that it has to be put into perspective. One of the good things about our archives over here [CSU Northridge], they not only have my papers and the papers of some of the other people regarding what happened, but they also have the archives of the blacks, and that's important. And in order to write Chicano history, you have to know Black history.

01-01:08:42

Holmes:

And as you pointed out in your book that discusses these blowouts on the campuses, in California, San Francisco State gets a lot of the attention, but that kind of activism over a curriculum change, the creation of African American studies as well as Mexican American studies, that activism also started here, at Cal State, Northridge.

01-01:09:09

Acuña:

Well, it didn't start here, but it was one of the little fountains.

01-01:09:14

Holmes:

Yeah, one of the earliest, that's right.

01-01:09:16

Acuña:

Yeah, it was one of the earliest. I think that, just like I said, I think that LA State was far ahead of us, because of the concentration of the population there, but I do think that for an awful lot of reasons, one of them being demographic change.

01-01:09:39

Holmes:

And what impact, when we are thinking of social activism influencing the field of Chicano studies, what impact did this have on both you personally and politically, but also as a young academic?

01-01:09:59

Acuña:

Well, I didn't feel like an academic, and I always felt that I was privileged in being a Mexican because I could do anything I wanted. They weren't going to fire me here. The school would've burned. And so consequently, I had a special position. It also liberated me because I didn't give a shit about the profession. What do I care about decaying scholars? I didn't have any respect for them. I remember when I was fighting the fight over there at UCSB one time, one of the things was that I said that "nobody would miss the people that judge me over there"—the academicians were the people on that educational council—I said, "because not even their wives were going miss them because they were bad fucks." And, I could say that. I mean, who's going to do anything to me?

So there was a certain amount of what? There was a certain amount of cockiness there. Nobody was going to do anything to me. You only have as much power as you give yourself. And this is one thing that I try to translate to students, is that you have to what? Take your power. Nobody's going to give you any power. If you want to really be free, say anything that you want to say. So, look at our students, the way they walk around. They still walk

around with a little bit of the swagger. You should've seen them in the early seventies! You thought that they owned the fucking school. You see? And I want to see that. Now people are complaining about these kids. Why don't they complain about Donald Trump? Just because he has money?

01-01:12:20

Holmes:

Well you finished your PhD in 1968. I wanted to talk a little bit about some of your early scholarship, and then we can take a break. Now you've always described yourself foremost as a teacher.

01-01:12:38

Acuña:

Yeah. I'm an eighth-grade teacher.

01-01:12:40

Holmes:

And many of your earlier works, well, many of your works I think have that kind of classroom, student focus, and I wanted to talk about at least three of the earliest works that came out, which seemed to be written for the classroom. The first is in 1969, *The Story of the Mexican Americans*.

01-01:13:01

Acuña:

Okay. Look. These books are really—I went back and I'm going back and rewriting them, and God, you know, I don't see how they even got through editors! You know what I mean, and I look at them, and I say, "What the fuck? Who wrote these?" And so, I'm rewriting them. *The Story of the Mexican American*, I've already rewritten, first draft; also rewriting *Cultures in Conflict*, first draft is already done; and *Mexican American Chronicle*, I've almost finished that, and they're all what? They're all directed at a grade level. *The Story of the Mexican American* was about the third grade. The *Cultures in Conflict* was fifth grade. The *Chronicle* was high school.

The specific thing: you have to educate the kids, you have to start to change their attitudes. They've had all kinds of American history before they get into college: third grade, eighth grade, you see. You have eleventh grade and twelfth grade, all US history and government. And still they don't know American history. There has to be a certain amount of redundancy there. There has to be a certain amount of what? Building. So, this was my purpose. I wanted to get to what? Young kids. Also I gave talks at that time of saying, "Wouldn't it be great if every academician, Chicano academician," or I'll call them scholars, "academician, would write a children's book?" You know? Best book that I've ever read was [Antoine de Saint-] Exupéry's *The Little Prince*. I mean, it gave me a feeling! It taught me something. And this is what I was trying to do there. Now I'm trying; I did the *Cultures in Conflict*, and that whole thing is thinking, what is a cultural conflict, and giving more examples.

I wrote one that I had to destroy. Because of marriage, et cetera, it fell apart, but it was called *Taking Advantage Of*, and it starts off with a brother and sister; they were trying to drink chocolate milk. And the brother is pouring,

and each one doesn't want to get less chocolate milk than the other. So the brother then distracts the sister, takes two gulps, and then fills his up. Now I want the students to discuss, how is this taking advantage of? The second one is, a sister goes to the brother, and says, "Here, I'll give you this nickel for your dime." And, how is this taking advantage? They rationalize this as because the nickel is bigger than the dime. But [laughs] the worth there. So I go into that.

Well, then I started to go into things like Cuba. Well, when I sent it to the publisher, the publisher threw their hands up; they didn't want anything to do with it. But I wanted to get into those kind of books for children, you see. I also wanted to get into other stories, *The Story of the Mexican Americans*. Now, what happened was that, at the time that I wrote it, we were heavily into what? Our Mexican culture, which is really Spanish culture. Well I didn't want to get into that in nineteen, what? Today, 2018? I mean, that is like a bad suit. That is like bad language. So I'm rewriting that to conform to the story of today.

01-01:17:47

Holmes:

So, was it your teaching experience that really drove home the need for these type of books?

01-01:17:57

Acuña:

Yeah. I saw the kids, and I saw the principal: you bring in your kids, show them some family photo albums. First thing they're going to ask, "Where am I? Where am I? Oh, is that me?" They want to be seen in that book. If they're not seen in that book, they feel like they're not there; they're not part of that. When you look at Dick and Jane, like they used to say, if you look at Dick and Jane and the only Black you see in there is Spot, you know, that's not you. So to me it was simple. You have to get the kids into the picture.

01-01:18:45

Holmes:

Before we break, maybe we could talk just a little bit about your dissertation at USC. Now, in the program that you were in, you focused on the history of Northern Mexico, is that correct?

01-01:18:59

Acuña:

No, all of Mexico and Latin America. But, I needed a dissertation topic. Servin wanted me to do something unique. Nobody had ever done anything on Northern Mexico, and the connection that was my family and everything to Sonora seemed like it was doable. Also, I did not have the money nor did I have the time to go to Mexico City or archives in Latin America. So, my choice was then to go to Sonora, because the main archives were in the University of Arizona. But, I could get here and I could get out of class at three o'clock, possibly two o'clock, and I could drive to Tucson in ten hours; twelve hours.

I met a real nice guy, Joe Park, who was one of the curators over there, and when I got there, he would open up the archives for me, and I would be there alone, looking at them, and he would also help me by sending my work to the photographic thing. I'd have to pay for it, but still, they would take copies of it. Also, once a month, I would then drive from Tucson, or when there was a holiday, I would drive from Tucson to Hermosillo, which was another twelve hours, and I would work the archives for maybe three days and then come back. And so, the choice was one of convenience and necessity.

01-01:21:06
Holmes:

And was this the book that would later be published, the *Sonoran Strongman*?

01-01:21:09
Acuña:

The *Sonoran Strongman*. And out of *Sonoran Strongman* also came a contract. I also had a contract to write a book on the *los hombres del norte* [the men of the north] because two of the presidents that came out of the Mexican Revolution was [Plutarco Elías] Calles and [Álvaro] Obregón, and then [Felipe Adolfo] de la Huerta was also president. And so, they wanted me to write a trilogy there, and talk about the revolution from the perspective of Sonora. So I had that. On the strength of that, Servin, when he left Arizona State, because he left USC to go to Arizona State, he was going over to Santa Fe—no, no, he was going to Albuquerque, University of New Mexico. He flew me into Arizona State and they offered me the job, the historians there, the Latin Americanists, but with the understanding that I would give up Chicano history. And it was a lot better deal, because Arizona State was a research institution, and they would give me stipends for research. But I couldn't get away from Chicano studies at that particular time. It's all interrelated, you see. It's all interrelated.

But I have very close relations with Tucson. This is why those pictures, a lot of those pictures that were there. I took students there in 2010, 2012; I took sixty students, three trips of sixty students, to Tucson, and to Nogales, to see what was happening in Arizona, because then the students here could see that. But it also was to hook the students into doing fundraisers for what was happening over there. But Tucson's been very special. My mother went—while she was born in Agua Prieta, but then they went to Tucson, and then they came here. My mother was blind, as I said, and the shots that you got in Tucson would cost her five dollars. The shots that she got here in Sawtelle were two dollars. And so to keep my mother's anemia under control, they moved to LA. My grandfather worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad.

01-01:23:58
Holmes:

Well, maybe this is a good place to stop and take a break, and we'll pick up from here in the next session. Thanks, Rudy.

Interview 2: March 1, 2018

02-00:00:02

Holmes: All right. This is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. We're now going to begin our second session with Rudy Acuña for the Chicana/o Studies Oral History Project. Today's date is March 1, 2018, and we are here at his office at Cal State, Northridge. Rudy, first of all, thank you for the coffee. [laughs]

02-00:00:26

Acuña: You're welcome.

02-00:00:28

Holmes: I'd like to start out with discussing the field, what became known as Chicana/o studies, which was beginning to take shape, and one of the highlights of this began with the *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, the conference held there in April of 1969. Now, in your 2011 book, *Making Chicano Studies*, you do a great discussion on this and the other elements, so our readers can also check that work out. But could you discuss maybe the organization of this conference, who was involved, and your participation?

02-00:01:10

Acuña: Well, my participation was almost peripheral. I was invited. But, to the ones that really held it, probably you had one person—I forget his name—from Stanford, then there was Juan Gómez-Quiñones, which was a moving force. Chicano studies was a moving force, and it came out of also San Diego and out of Cal State LA, besides UCLA. Those were the movers. I was just there and I contributed the curriculum that we had already developed. Remember, things were moving very quickly. I came here on staff in March; by April, the major had already been approved. So I had to work day and night on that.

So, with the Plan, when I went there, I showed them what I had, and they published it, but I didn't know too much on who was doing it. Gracia de Pick, I think, the name I sent you, was very prominent on it. People forget about her. She was at Mesa College. And I think that an awful lot of mostly students were there. There were very few academicians.

02-00:02:53

Holmes: And, in your book, you talk about that there's myths and legends about this, that the conference was important in the sense of rallying support and a consciousness that we need programs such as Chicano studies. But on the other hand, the Education Opportunity Programs that began in 1965 already had things moving. As you mentioned, you were already developing the program here at Cal State, Northridge.

02-00:03:20

Acuña: Yeah, and the thing is that without EOP, we wouldn't have had the students. Without the students, we would've have had a program. And, when you start to look at that, this is almost similar to, in 1972, '73, we had Operation

Chicano Teacher, and what was important about that is it provided jobs. About '71, '72, I was talking to a colleague, Jorge García, and we said, "You know, yeah, it's good to give them a degree in Chicano studies, but what the fuck are they going to do with it?" Well at that time, you could go into teaching, and you can still go into teaching. Also, English as a second language was coming about. So, then we're going to need teachers for that.

So we worked out a deal, Jorge mostly, over here with Oxnard School District, and some of the small school districts in Ventura County, that they would take our students as interns. Now the importance there is that they didn't then have to do their last year of student teaching, and they could continue their education and get paid for it. So all of a sudden, we had some fifty students out there as teachers—also in San Fernando and Pacoima. So we had two counties. We had over there, Ventura County, and we had these two areas here in LA, or in the San Fernando Valley.

So, the word got around—you can get a job with Chicano studies, you can get paid for it—and that had a lot of impact on us. Well the same thing too—you have to give them an incentive, and the incentive is going to be material. Without that, we wouldn't have grown Chicano studies. If they couldn't get jobs, then why take a Chicano studies major? You tell them, "Well, you can go to law school," but law schools were even what? Discriminating. So kind of like that, that was it. Does that answer the question?

02-00:05:48

Holmes:

Well, it's a very important detail to the question. Why don't we take a step back and discuss—now you're hired in 1969, to come here with the specific purpose of being the founding chair of Chicano studies—

02-00:06:03

Acuña:

Yeah, I turned it down, at first, turned down the job. I thought to myself, I've got two book contracts. Within two years, I can get a job anyplace that I want, so why not stay at Dominguez Hills, wait it out, and go to a research institution? This is too risky. In 1969—you know, everybody gave us a 1 percent chance of surviving. However, Warren Furumoto, who's a biology teacher here, and a good comrade, tells me, he says, "Hey Rudy, yeah, you're a Marxist; you're a Socialist." He says, "You know, you have to take risks. You have to do it for the people." And he says, "If not, you're a phony." Well, I was shamed into taking the job.

02-00:07:09

Holmes:

He called your bluff. [laughs]

02-00:07:10

Acuña:

He called my bluff, yeah! He called my bluff. But you know, he says, "The only chance that we have right now, surviving, is bringing in a person like you because you have a PhD. You have the union card." He says, "These son of a bitches here at this college won't pay attention to a person that doesn't have

the union card. And they told me," he says, "Julian Nava tells me, 'Insist on tenure,'" he says, "because without tenure, they're going to get rid of you." He says, "That will give you then that *palanca*, the influence, to get things done." And that's what I did! I got tenure within a year; that was the condition, you see, and I had a full professorship.

02-00:08:01

Holmes:

As a full professor—you were just in your mid-to-late thirties by that time.

02-00:08:05

Acuña:

I was in my mid-thirties. Yeah, and I mean, that was fairly good! And my whole argument was, hey, I have what, twelve years of teaching experience? I have book contracts. You see, you can't get anybody else. And that's how I got it.

02-00:08:27

Holmes:

And so, in setting up the curriculum, you came here in the spring of 1969, and you go into some great detail in your book on this. But for us, talk about some of the obstacles of setting up the curriculum, because just because the university says, "Fine, we'll establish a Chicano studies department," that doesn't mean that the obstacles are done. I mean, you had to navigate a lot with both administration and faculty here.

02-00:08:58

Acuña:

Well, yeah you had to go through committees, and then you had to explain it. You had to explain it on their terms. One of the things is, I said, "No, we're not a discipline. We're an inter-discipline. We're multidiscipline. We are an area study." Now, fortunately, we had enough people here in English and other places that were in American studies, and similar programs. They were becoming very popular. Remember, area studies is also Asian studies, but Asian meant over there; it didn't mean here. Well the same thing with us. We were Latin America but we're here, so we're a thing, so I could explain that and I could explain it intelligently, and they would what? Understand me. I said, "Yeah, yeah, we have a core of knowledge. We'd explain all of those, we would go right down to it, you see. Yeah, we're not a discipline; we're a multidiscipline." So this is what went on there.

02-00:10:08

Holmes:

And now you've said before, too, that in regard to some of the obstacles, first of all, there was a bit of resentment among some of the faculty.

02-00:10:17

Acuña:

Oh yeah, there was an awful lot of resentment, yeah. There was a resentment because they burnt—there was a fire in the building that was the administration building over there. They had kidnapped, they said, one of the faculty members from PE. The students were disrespectful. They were bringing in a lot of color, you see. And so consequently, yeah, they were very resentful. They were resentful that I came in as a full professor. A lot of them were what? They're assistant professors. I cut into the line. They were

resentful because I was a high school teacher at one time. There were a lot of things, the elitism of the institution. They don't give a shit about pedagogy. They just give a shit about what? Themselves. So, I had to do that. I had to go in there; I had to break that down.

Fortunately, and unfortunately, we had conservatives as administrators. We had a guy by the name of Dave Benson, who later became vice president. When I came in, he told me, "You know what? I don't believe in Chicano studies," he says, "but it's my job to make you successful, so I'll do everything to make you successful." He kept his word! Liberals would stab me in the back. Dave Benson kept his thing. We had James Cleary that later became president within a year. James Cleary was from the University of Wisconsin. Didn't look good because he was the one who called the National Guard. But, he had respect for academia, for governance, and so I got through the committees; he respected my governance role. So consequently, you have to give the good and the bad. Most of the faculty members, no. Remember, this institution at one time was controlled by the Mormons.

02-00:12:42

Holmes:

Oh, interesting. I didn't know that.

02-00:12:43

Acuña:

Yeah, it was controlled by the Mormons. I think two or three of the first presidents, were Mormons. The whole community here was Mormon. They have a Mormon temple up there.

02-00:12:54

Holmes:

Oh, interesting.

02-00:12:55

Acuña:

Yeah. And so consequently, they tend to be very conservative.

02-00:13:01

Holmes:

Perhaps a surprising area of opposition you mentioned in those committees was the Spanish department. Some may not know that before Chicano studies, if you were going to study within that field, or that area, that the Spanish department felt like it had some turf there. I know Ramón Saldívar, for example, when he was at grad school at Yale, there was no Chicano literature at that time, but luckily, he found someone within the Spanish and Latin American literature departments to work with. So, did you experience that here as well?

02-00:13:40

Acuña:

Oh, very much so, and the Spanish department a year before opposed the bringing in of minority students, unqualified minority students, and three of the signers were of Mexican extraction. They also thought that if we taught Spanish, we would teach Castilian Spanish, and they went on down. When we proposed the class on the Novel of the Mexican Revolution, they had a shit fit. But, I had more votes, and one of the reasons that I had more was because we

had six positions. That meant that those six people could vote for the president; they could vote for committees.

So we went to the union, and we made a deal: "If you support our issues, we'll vote union, the AFT, the American Federation of Teachers." And so, we would vote in block. At that time, when I was chair, and then when I was controlling the department, I didn't let the faculty vote, because I voted the ballots for them, because then, I could assure that everybody voted the right way. And they said, "Well that's dictatorial." "Yeah, that's dictatorial, but it's getting you your promotions. It's getting you the courses that you want to teach. It's getting you then an awful lot of the things, the perks of the university." But the union was one of our biggest backers, because of that, and they were able to keep control of the councils, through votes like ours. This is just plain politics. This is not something that's learned in graduate school.

02-00:15:50

Holmes:

No, not at all.

02-00:15:52

Acuña:

You see? But I had been, remember, a union steward since I was a janitor. I used to work as a janitor for the LA City Schools, and so I was a union steward.

02-00:16:02

Holmes:

Did your teaching experience also influence the way you approached these obstacles? I mean, when you're in a school that could be unionized, you're also dealing with administration. This wasn't coming out of graduate school and the first time of having to deal with, as you said, these type of politics.

02-00:16:24

Acuña:

Well, I think so. It helped me an awful lot. It also helped me to, again, not seeing color on it—seeing color, but not dwelling on it. I made an awful lot of friends among the clerical staff. I had a good spine at work. I knew what was happening in the administration, because I had some clerk, she was working for this department or that department, so I would get privy information.

So consequently yeah, it comes from hustling. You know what hustling is. When I was a kid, we used to make extra money. My cousin was a good billiard player, a good pool player, and I would hustle the bets. You do this. I was a supply sergeant in the Army for a while, and made a lot of money that way. You were always hustling. My favorite character on television was a Sergeant Bilko, and you can go to YouTube and see Sergeant Bilko, and he was always what? Selling this, selling that. Being a Mexican, you're a natural vendor; my family was. They'd take clothes from here and take them to Mexico, and sell them. It was that.

02-00:18:01

Holmes:

So, the way you're also explaining it, there was a certain amount of not just teaching experience, but also street smarts that helped you, which if we're

honest, a lot of people within the academy may not always come from that kind of background or have that experience.

02-00:18:16

Acuña:

Yeah, and this is also, too, true of the immigrant. The DACA students here are among the nicest students. They're nice students. They're good students. I don't know how they can object to them, because they're really civil. They would've had a hard time making it here in 1971. I mean, when they came in here, they scared me. We probably would've not survived the first year if it wouldn't have been for women. The young Chicanas were academically qualified. The [laughs] Chicanos were not. They were in the streets all the time. The Chicana had no alternative but to study.

02-00:19:07

Holmes:

Well, and in regard to then, so you're establishing the department, you get through these hurdles, and then, now it's time to actually hire faculty. You've discussed that you had difficulty with that, with trying to attract new Chicano PhDs.

02-00:19:24

Acuña:

Yeah, and the thing is that we did. So, we had two others that had PhDs, and they were both in literature. Fullerton went down because they said, "Oh, we had more PhDs than anybody else"—they had six. But they were all in literature. Why, I could have gotten all of the literature PhDs that I wanted, but I didn't want them in literature. I wanted them in sociology. I wanted them in English. I wanted them in different fields. Couldn't get them. So our plan was, it was like a baseball team. You put them in a farm team, and eventually they would go to the big leagues. Well, our plan was that we would hire people as lecturers, and then instructors, and then we would move them up. If they got a master's degree, then they would go up to an assistant professor. When they got their PhD, they would go up to an associate professor. If they didn't get their PhD they would remain as an associate professor. And so, we had a lot of people that did get their PhDs, about five of them, under that plan. We would also give them release time to go to school.

Some of them didn't. We had some people that didn't want to get even a master's. They didn't last. Then here, the pressure came from students. The students wanted to know that they have experts. When you're in college, you learn that the expert in the field is a PhD. If you don't have a PhD, you're not an expert in the field. Even if you have an EdD, you're suspect. You don't have it as a content field. So, a lot of good people never got tenure. Lorenzo Flores died before, and he didn't get it. And, to me, I'm still haunted by it because he was a real good teacher. He was a good person. But, he did not have the PhD, nor did he have an arts degree, Master of Fine Arts, because with a Master of Fine Arts, you can teach; it's the equivalent.

So consequently, that really shaped our agenda. We had to have PhDs coming in. Something that people still don't get: if you're going to be a department,

you're going to have any type of category, you have to have PhDs. We cannot hire today without a person having a PhD in hand.

02-00:22:28

Holmes: You've mentioned a number of times that the students were really the driving force, and they are always the driving force behind a department.

02-00:22:37

Acuña: Yeah.

02-00:22:40

Holmes: We've talked a little bit about how both the Black Student Union as well as the Union of Mexican American Students were very active on this campus, and really provided that kind of spark and driving force. What were some of the ways you saw the students inspiring and growing this department?

02-00:23:09

Acuña: Well, the militancy. They were always, like, for example, they wanted to fire me, and the dean's council was driving that.

02-00:23:22

Holmes: And what year was this?

02-00:23:25

Acuña: Must've been around '75, '76, and then Warner Masters, who was also Mormon, who was the finance dean, very powerful guy, turns around to Cleary, he says, "Do you want 1968 to come back?" And he said, "No." He said, "Well, fire him, and you're going to have student demonstrations." So, [laughs] it's always that they gave me carte blanche to do anything I wanted, or the department to do anything it wanted, because it was that feeling.

Second of all, the first seven, eight years, we had a governing committee that was made up of three students—no, four students—three community members, and three faculty. And, anytime they voted, we had another committee of faculty that would mirror it, rubberstamp what they said. So consequently, they were the driving force there. In the first five, six, seven years, we also used to meet on Wednesday at the Chicano House. We used to put a gallon of Red Mountain wine on the floor, and everybody would drink their wine, and we would criticize each other, and they would criticize. They would criticize what we did; we would criticize what they did.

Well, they were pretty much shaping a lot of the department. The power that I had, and not to be hypocritical, was that I always took the option of saying, "Well, if I don't like what you're saying, I'll go along with it, but I'll resign." So then they would have to make the decision whether they wanted me to resign. I wasn't chair at that time but I was a faculty member and I had a lot of influence. And so consequently, one time, they wanted to get rid of one of the professors, and I told them, I said, "You know, he's only been here six months, and we've flown him out from Ohio and he has his family here. It's not fair!

Yeah, we'll fire him, but I'll also resign." And so they changed their mind. But students were fairly responsible. You give them power, and they're responsible.

02-00:26:12

Holmes:

Well, over the decades, the department that you helped found in 1969 has become the largest Chicana and Chicano studies department in the United States.

02-00:26:24

Acuña:

Yes it is.

02-00:26:26

Holmes:

I think it's what, twenty-eight tenured professors?

02-00:26:28

Acuña:

Twenty-eight, then we have over forty, what do you call them, adjunct professors? The lecturers? And so consequently, it's huge. We have 160, 166 sections of Chicano studies. But remember, Chicano studies, we have linguistics. The head of the linguistics department is also in Chicano studies, you see. We have political science; we have a lot of critical study sections, critical thinking. We have the history. We have literature. All of these courses go into Chicano studies. Chicano studies is not history. Chicano studies is what? An area.

02-00:27:22

Holmes:

Exactly.

02-00:27:24

Acuña:

People in Berkeley say, "Well that was a CIA invention." No, it was the invention of most of the progressives that were coming out of the nineteenth, I mean out of the twentieth century. But, the CIA and other agencies took it up because they found it as an efficient way of teaching. You teach language and you can teach all of the other areas. Look at the Monterey School of Language. Monterey School of Language, you have to look at that and study it. I used to study the Monterey School of Languages, to the point that I was trying to mirror it here by getting houses in the barrio of families to board up students so they could learn the language, and then they could also be immersed in the language at home. And that was the Monterey School of Language. I mean, for anybody not to look at them and study them, and study the innovations that they've brought, that would be stupidity.

02-00:28:26

Holmes:

What do you think was the key to the success? Because over the decades, a lot of departments and programs, they may grow, but then shrink, or just kind of decline. The program here at Northridge has stayed strong, and large. What do you see as some of the successful policies that have helped that?

02-00:28:54

Acuña:

Well, key people. I think Mary, that's why I keep on pushing Mary, and Mary Pardo was key to that. People like her. She's genuinely a likeable person. The students like her. Our present chair, Gabriel [Gutiérrez], he is very innovative. He's very active. Programs like taking them to Arizona, and being there, eating with them, driving with them, that bonds you. You see? I think an awful lot of little things has kept it invigorated, a lot of very little things.

02-00:29:42

Holmes:

Going back to the students—there are things that you could do to keep attracting and bonding with the students, but there's also the students themselves, coming—

02-00:29:52

Acuña:

Well, yeah, and the students, let's say for example, jobs. Gabriel has a program right now with the Forest Service. The Forest Service wants to hire Chicano studies majors because they think outside the box. They're hustlers, and so they want to think out of the box. And so, they go up in the summers, they go up there to the site over there and they participate in classes, et cetera. I think that they like that. They like other programs. We have a lecture series, where we have at least four lectures a week, that's open to the public. We just had, oh, what's his name, that Puerto Rican who just got out of prison? He was in there for thirty-five years. López, Oscar López, he came on campus. I think all of these activities, they give you an identification.

02-00:30:59

Holmes:

Well, as you were developing and putting together the department here at Northridge, Chicano studies, as a field, as an area, was beginning to also kind of carve out some intellectual space, at least in the field of history. In 1967, *El Grito*, the journal out of UC Berkeley, began. *Aztlán*, the *Chicano Journal of Social Sciences and Arts* out of UCLA also began, and then the *Journal of Mexican American History* at UC Santa Barbara. What do you recall about the reception, and in your own observation, as these journals were coming out?

02-00:31:49

Acuña:

Well, I also read them, but the thing is that remember, again, to appreciate something in the journals, you have to have a certain background. When people have a hard time reading, which they did at that time, you see, it was hard for them to like those journals, or appreciate those journals. Well like, the Santa Barbara one, we never heard of. *Aztlán*, when it came out, was a little bit more because it was more popular. It took time. Today, even, those journals attract, they attract mostly graduate students, or students that are in the upper range.

Our students appreciate them, but they appreciate more the verbal learning. This is why I think that we have to start to move into other areas. I think we have to start in some of our classes to go into and develop games, like Super Mario, and go from, to each step to the other. Our students still have not

reached the point that they were the type like, for example, many students in the sixties would read the newspaper. They're not to the point that they read the newspaper, or, this is why the thing on Facebook is good, because it introduces them to different things. Not that I like Facebook, but it does introduce them; it has a function.

02-00:33:44

Holmes:

True. I wanted to get your perspective too on, when we speak of journals, and one of the key moments that some point out that gave some academic legitimacy, both to young departments, but also the field itself, was in 1973 when the *Pacific Historical Review* did a special issue on Chicano history. Do you remember when this came out?

02-00:34:14

Acuña:

Yeah.

02-00:34:15

Holmes:

What was your recollections and thoughts on that?

02-00:34:17

Acuña:

Well, the recollection was that it was not relevant to us, at that particular time. We were looking for a relevance in space, rather than a relevance in some journal. It's like, for example, myself, why didn't I turn to journalism? When I write books, if they're read by a thousand people, that's an awful lot of people. Anytime I put out an article, or I put out a blog today, I'm read by five, ten thousand people. Well, a person with a big ego, like myself, prefers they'll be read by more people. It's things that are relevant. It's not relevant to most of our students if we're prestigious out there, as long as we don't have power in here. I don't know if I'm making myself clear. So I'm just saying, that was out there.

Like for example, we had a wave in 1971, '70, where everybody, "We're going to become Marxist." And, they came to a conference, they jammed it, and they told our students that they had to do away with all their mariachis, and their culture, and all of the murals and everything; they were too nationalistic. Well we just told them, "Go fuck yourself," because this was the thing that they didn't understand that was keeping that community together. Those symbols were keeping the community together. So that was our reality. Well, at Berkeley, they could talk about Marx, and they understood him. These kids didn't have the time. Look, you have kids coming out of the Ventura area, were different than the students here, because those students had to get up every morning and work the fields. So, their reality is much different than the reality here, and the reality here is much different than it was in San Francisco.

So, it's just, what is your objective? What do you want? We have the third largest department at this university. That's part of our relevance. We're big, you see. We're big. We bring in an awful lot of money. Everything at the state

university level revolves around FTE, full-time teacher equivalency. And everything revolves around it; even a pencil revolves around that. So consequently, being that large, we're too large to fail, and if our dean does not treat us well, at a certain point, we can rebel and we can hurt. And they can't hurt us, because if Chicano studies went offline, it would cost them forty faculty positions. You see what I mean?

So consequently it's all then numbers, nothing to do with what those journals are. Those journals were very good. I never published in any of them, but they were very good. But even then, why should I publish in one of those journals when the AHA is asking me for articles, et cetera? You know, early in my career, the chair of my dissertation told me, "You have to write book reviews, because it keeps you current with the literature, you build up a library, and your name gets out there." I've now published about 300 book reviews, then used to be a regular to *Choice*. But you know what? That helps, but why should I give that up to go into another journal to talk to people that may listen to me and may not listen to me? That's not my audience.

02-00:39:13

Holmes:

That's interesting. Well I'd like to talk a little bit about the development of the field. Some had said, the works of the first generation usually revolve around four to five themes, mostly focused on California or Texas. These themes traced the Chicano experience to the nineteenth century; explored Mexican Americans as a racialized minority of the Southwest; and highlighted the community experience as being defined much more in an urban context, as well as looking at the dynamics of immigration. What were your thoughts on some of these early works and themes?

02-00:40:10

Acuña:

I think they were very necessary. They were stepping stones. I didn't agree with all of them; I didn't read all of them. Being a book reviewer, I had to read many of them. But, I think they're very necessary; they're very important. I don't think we would have Chicano history without having some of the works, for example, of Ernesto Galarza, and *Spiders in the Field*; *Barrio Boy*. All of these are very important. I am a nineteenth-century historian, but I don't agree with nineteenth-century Mexican history. We're talking about neo-liberalism today. Neo-liberalism is based on nineteenth century liberalism. So, what are they doing? The Bourbons in the 1700s are privatizing the missions. What are the liberals doing in the nineteenth century? They're privatizing the church land, but also corporate land, the people that belong to the villages. What are they doing today? They're privatizing the *ejidos*, you see, going back on the Mexican Constitution of 1917.

I think your knowledge of history then allows you to interrelate these things. What I hope that people do right now is to think about these things. Benito Juárez was not a great Mexican president. No, he was the first capitalist president of Mexico that took full control. Porfirio Díaz was merely mirroring

him. And so consequently, there's room for constant reinterpretation, constant reinterpretation.

02-00:42:34

Holmes:

Well I wanted to talk actually about some of your scholarship, and beginning in 1972, because we talked about your first three works in our first session, so I'd like to turn to 1972, when your signature text came out, *Occupied America*.

02-00:42:49

Acuña:

And you know what made that book? The title. I was struggling up until the last whether I was going to call it "Occupied Mexico," or "Occupied America," and I said, "No, Mexico is occupied by the Spanish. We're occupying what? United States is occupying America. But, and this referred to the occupation not only of the United States but the occupation of Chile, the occupation of Peru, the occupation, because they're all American, you see. They're all American. At the time, I didn't want to fight with the term "America," because I said, "Why should we fight over the term 'America' when it was the name of an Italian cartographer?" So I didn't want to get into that shit. So that's why I went to "Occupied America," but it caught on. It was a catchphrase, you see. People liked "Occupied America."

02-00:43:56

Holmes:

And your original subtitle, *The Chicano Struggle Toward Liberation*, and then that subtitle changed to—

02-00:44:05

Acuña:

The *History*. And that was to gain respectability. But that was it. History is a struggle.

02-00:44:15

Holmes:

Well discuss the genesis of this project. How did it come around, and when did you start working on that?

02-00:44:22

Acuña:

I really started working on it in probably late '69—no, '70, 1970, when I was doing everything here. I think I was pissed off. After the moratorium, I was just pissed off, so I wanted to write our own history. Remember the saying: "The hunter will be the center of the story, the hero of the story until the lion has a historian," something like that, and so I thought that we should just have that. I was approached by Canfield Press, which is really Harper and Row, to write it, but they wanted it fast. Well, at this time it was difficult because I was on the verge of a divorce. I was working too hard here. And so I took six months off and I went to Mexico, and in Mexico, I wrote the book.

02-00:45:34

Holmes:

Oh wow. In six months?

02-00:45:37

Acuña:

Yeah.

02-00:45:37

Holmes:

Oh wow. And this is where you started to use the internal colonial model—

02-00:45:46

Acuña:

Well it was very, very popular. Everybody was using the internal colonial model. Remember we were into [Frantz] Fanon an awful lot, or Albert Memmi, all of these people. So I took that up, but I didn't know that I was going to get caught in the cross currents, because now the Chicanos are starting to go to school, to graduate school. You had [Ruggiero] Romano and his staff, and these people had come up with, first of all, they come up with the colonialism, and then [Immanuel] Wallerstein, and so, no, the internal colonial were not internal colonized. You are then stretching it, et cetera; it's great; it's great.

Well, I had the option of just fighting that, and holding my ground, or just saying, "Well okay, I don't believe in it anymore anyway," but they're going on. I was too busy. More relevant to me was the divorce that was going to come afterwards. More relevant to me was this department. So I just changed it, and I changed it to history, and it was a straight history then. There is less to argue about in history, than to argue about a model. I've never been for paradigms that much.

By the way, it's come back now. I mean, you look at Facebook and people are telling me right now, "Why did you abandon it?" I said, "I didn't abandon it." I said, "I was forced out." But the thing is that now it's come up. Now with the young Chicano, they want the internal colonial model because it best explains their situation. One of the problems then with the Chicano academician, none of them, or very few of them, really had a pulse on what the people were thinking. Yeah, a few of them, like Juan Gómez is very good about that. He's into the indigeneity right now and it's very good; it's a breakthrough. But most of them, they didn't know what the people were thinking about. They didn't know that you had to make it exciting for them. Internal colonialism, it sounds what? It sounds important.

02-00:48:32

Holmes:

Now your intervention in the field outside of wanting to tell a different side of history that seemed to be ignored, and to put that at center stage, were you also trying to intervene in some of these discussions of a kind of pluralistic society, and acculturation as some would be discussing it, versus a type of self-determination?

02-00:49:05

Acuña:

Well, it's mostly self-determination. But the thing is that I think that you have to go beyond this. Excuse me, can I just look at [phone rings]—

02-00:49:19

Holmes:

Sure, sure, go ahead.

02-00:49:21

Acuña: I think it's my wife. [Checking phone] Okay.

02-00:50:00

Holmes: As you were saying, the discussion, if we were breaking it into camps looking at pluralism versus self-determination, if we even wanted to divide it that way, were you aiming to intervene in that discussion, or mostly just present a more thorough history of the community?

02-00:50:28

Acuña: Just to present history, yeah. I mean, first of all, I never wanted to be part of academe. I never believed that they were going to change a fucking thing. What were they going to change? If they're going to get out there and write popular works, what were they going to change? This is why the literature people are so important in the Chicano community, Rudolfo Anaya's work, et cetera, because they're telling a story. They're not trying to change anything; they're just telling the story. But what historians, what political scientists have made a difference? I can't name any. They've contributed a little bit more now with the literature on immigration, but that's just starting. Some of them do real good work—I've read some good works on immigration lately—but nobody reads them. Marta Tienda writes some very good works, but nobody reads them, just other academicians. So, I knew that I couldn't make a difference, that I wasn't going to do anything that was earth shattering. So consequently, that was it.

02-00:52:02

Holmes: I'd like you to discuss a little bit, before we move on to your other works, the initial reception of *Occupied America*.

02-00:52:13

Acuña: Bad! It was great among Chicanos. It was greater among students; it was greater among activists, not so well among the academics, not so much academics. There was a book written about Morenci, Clifton-Morenci, in which the writer says that when he went into the home of one of the union organizers, that he saw a copy of *Occupied America*, and that made my day. That made my day. One student told me, he says, "I read your book and I threw a rock or a brick through the window of Taco Bell." That made my day. That was what I was writing for. I wasn't writing for the other academicians. I wasn't writing for approval. I was writing because I wanted to write, you see. I'm not the greatest writer in the world, but I write, and like I tell the students, "Every one of you have a book in you. Write ten term papers, that's a book. Just write."

02-00:53:38

Holmes: I think you were saying before off camera, that you're editing the ninth edition right now. It's been nine.

02-00:53:46

Acuña:

Ninth edition, yeah, and that's entirely different. Some of the chapters are very good. Other chapters are like this, you know, but it's different. It's more on identity in that identity changes, and you can't call a person a *vendido* [sell out] because their grandfather was a *vendido*. We all change. Also, we live in a society where there are an awful lot of good white people. There are a lot of good Mexican people. There are a lot of good Black people. But there are a lot of bad ones in each group, and I think that you have to look at that, and that's what history is supposed to make you do, make selections.

02-00:54:41

Holmes:

Well your next work after that, which was your dissertation, or based off your dissertation: the *Sonoran Strongman, Ignacio Pesqueira and His Times*. Now this was a biography in some ways on—

02-00:54:58

Acuña:

No, it was really a view of liberals in the State of Sonora, liberalism in the State of Sonora, during the period of Ignacio Pesqueira. He was one of those *caudillos* [dictators] that was there for a hell of a long time. He was the one too that really accelerated the Yaqui Wars, et cetera.

02-00:55:31

Holmes:

Now in some respects, and I've never actually had anybody discuss the work this way, but to me when I was reading the book, it could be an early example of what they would later call borderlands studies, in some respects—before the phrase came around. This is not just hitting the nineteenth century kind of experience, but a trans-border experience.

02-00:56:00

Acuña:

Yeah. You see, which is the experience of my family. My family used to fluctuate from Magdalena to Tucson. They used to go like this, back and forth. It was a revolving door. My mother's family first came into Sonora in the 1720s, and they started off there because Sonora was what? Mining. And they started off as miners there. Then they became military people, because the military people then could survey all of the land and see which land that they wanted. Then at the last stage when they got older, they became merchants. The founder of the Elias family ended up in El Paso in 1790, because El Paso by that time had become a mercantile center.

02-00:57:14

Holmes:

Well the next work coming after that, which was another full monograph, was *Community Under Siege*, and in this—

02-00:57:25

Acuña:

You know, the second and the third editions are two separate editions. The whole trajectories are different in both of these.

02-00:57:35

Holmes:

Really? And these are chronicles of history in the Chicano community, in largely East LA, during 1945 and 1975. Discuss the genesis of this work.

02-00:57:52

Acuña:

Well the genesis of this came that couple of students needed a job, and there was a newspaper by the name of *Eastside Sun*, and one person that I forget who told me, says, "You know, the *Eastside Sun* is a treasure trove. It's like a community bulletin board," where you had a lot of different things there. So, I put in for a small grant of \$8,000 to get a camera, and then keep some students working. So we went through the *Eastside Sun*, which, it wasn't being digitized, and at that time it was not as popular. And so we microfilmed every article on Mexicans in Boyle Heights and Belvedere area. So we did that, and then, I went through, myself, the *Belvedere Citizen*, and did the same thing. Then I put each article on a three-by-eight card, five-by-eight card, and then annotated them. This is how that came about. There was a school called the French *Annales*; they came out of Paris, and they used to do the same thing, document. The history was a documentation of the present, and you documented it like this, and this is what I did at that particular time.

And so that's how that book came about! But what did I learn? I learned an awful lot. First of all, I learned that the 1970s were not an era of nothing happening, which I said in the first edition. A lot was happening at that time, McCarthyism, all of these things. There was also a community organizing at that time, among the Left, et cetera. So I got all of that down there, and I started changing my perspective. I also started to go into urban history, urban renewal, which has become so important, et cetera. And then, the book was put apart; it's a different kind of book. It's not a narrative all the way through. The first part was the synthesis, you see, and the second part with the articles. And so that's what I did at that time, and it's been one of the more influential books for people doing work on East LA.

02-01:00:46

Holmes:

And again, there's almost a teaching aspect to that too, because you're providing the documents there.

02-01:00:53

Acuña:

Yeah. This is going down, step by step, step by step, step by step.

02-01:01:00

Holmes:

Well, we can talk about some of your later works here in a few minutes, but I also wanted to ask if there was other significant works coming out of what they would call this first generation, during the seventies and eighties, that really strike you worth mentioning.

02-01:01:15

Acuña:

I think Juan's work, Juan Gómez Quiñones's work is worth mentioning. He has a different perspective. He's a lot more careful than I am. He's also very methodical. But I respect that work, and that influenced me. Not so much the work of Julian Samora. I liked him an awful lot, but it was elementary. But it was good; it was very necessary. You learned also too, you learned, by this time, your intellectual perspective, let's say for example in 1970, the

perspective of the Marxists on homosexuality was that it was a product of decadent capitalism, and everybody believed it.

02-01:02:16

Holmes: Oh wow.

02-01:02:17

Acuña: Well, I didn't go along with it but I did not counter it. It wasn't part of my dialogue. On feminism, I found that there was a work of Gerda Lerner. I thought it was very good. But the thing is that my perspective on it was very what? It was inchoate. By this time in the 1980s, it starts to change. It starts to change more because two Chicanas approached me at a NACCS thing, and Deena González and oh, I forget her name, and I know her very well, told me, "You know, we're not saying that you're anti-woman, that you're sexist, but you don't do anything about it." And I thought about it too; yeah, maybe I should talk out on it. They said, "You're very influential, and especially students listen to you."

And at this point then I start to change more. There's an evolving aspect to all of us, and by this time I start then to become a little bit more proactive on the subject. I start to see the relationship on the oppression of gays and the oppression of minorities. But it takes an awful long time for people to learn, especially when you've been brought up a Catholic. Catholicism does a number on you. And so consequently, I start to change then.

02-01:04:20

Holmes: During these early works too, we have certain themes and genres that we see come out. One is community studies, which helps in the sense, the aim of recovering the past. Then you also have say, Mario Garcia's generation model, which he started exploring throughout most of his career. What were your thoughts on these?

02-01:04:59

Acuña: Well, the generation model, there has been some recent works that do a real good job on the generation. I think that Mario's is not based on documents, as much as these later works, and they come of sociology, and I think they do a better job. Mario's not a sociologist; he's a historian. He would do kind of the work that I would do. You base it on documents, and he would make generalizations. I thought they were interesting, and I've incorporated some of the ideas, but I think that some of the later generation, the present generation, do a better job on it.

02-01:05:59

Holmes: Interesting. Well, that is what we hope, right? That we stand on the shoulders of others, that they would take our work and expand upon it?

02-01:06:06

Acuña: Yeah, but I don't think that we do, because I have met an awful lot of people who have never read *Occupied America* who are academicians, because

maybe they heard something derogatory about it from one of their professors, where they have preconceived notions, you see. I tend to read everything. I read very quickly. My regimen every day is I get up between 4:00 and 5:00, and I work for at least two, three hours, and most of it's in reading. Facebook I read because it presents an awful lot of obscure information that I may use, especially today on gentrification.

02-01:06:58

Holmes:

Well, I'd like to then shift to mentoring the second generation. Now, in your program, there's a bachelor's degree, there's also master's students here at the Cal State. Discuss your experience of mentoring—what were your goals in your pedagogy of mentoring the younger generations?

02-01:07:28

Acuña:

I think mentoring, you see, we have a split here. I'm not a big fan—I'm not an obstacle, but I'm not a big fan of graduates. I think the education of graduate students are for the UC. They have the money to do it. The MA that we have here, and it's a small number, maybe a dozen, that costs us an awful lot, and that takes away from my first love, and that is the undergraduate. I want to see the expression on students when they learn how to read.

So I do think that we should do an awful lot more. In recent years, we haven't done enough. Like, for example: I wanted a course taught and that every Chicano would have to take it, on Kumon math, and the Kumon method, because it really gets them math-ready. You look at the method, it's repetitive, and I think that that's part of our function. People will say, "Well, that's not Chicano studies!" No, but it's giving skills. Chicano studies is skills, and then what? Skills and then your courses, your subject matter. But you can't divorce them, so you have to really give them skills. And just like I said, they don't have the skill right now, a lot of them don't have the skill to read academic journals. It fatigues them. Well, it fatigues me; why doesn't it fatigue them? You see.

02-01:09:28

Holmes:

[laughs] That's true.

02-01:09:28

Acuña:

Okay, so you start to look at that. So, I'm not hard and fast on that.

02-01:09:35

Holmes:

I'd like to talk a little bit now about the maturation of the field, as one who set up one of the first Chicano studies departments in 1969, to where, by the 1990s, you've seen this field, this discipline, flourish and blossom to include programs at a number of universities across the nation, and as well as a rising number of Mexican American PhDs. As you were saying, when you received yours in 1968, there wasn't that many who stood on the same platform as you.

02-01:10:23

Acuña:

About fifty.

02-01:10:24

Holmes: Yeah. Well, what has really struck you about the maturation of the field?

02-01:10:31

Acuña: Well, it's not the maturation of the field; it's the literature of the field. Remember, there's a difference between the field and works done in the field, or topics done, and monographs done.

02-01:10:48

Holmes: Discuss that, because it's interesting, and I think you and I broached this yesterday in our conversations, where we sometimes conflate the two: scholarship versus the actual programs of teaching, right? And I think in your book, *The Making of Chicano Studies*, you touch on that point a few times.

02-01:11:10

Acuña: What really does it help us if a dissertation is written out of Harvard? What difference does it make to my students? What difference does it make to anybody else? It doesn't give us prestige here, because that's the Ford model. You know, the Fords killed black studies, because they put in what? They put in academicians there, PhDs in there, and they got rid of all of the activists, the militants. And, they found that the PhDs didn't help the field of black studies. What helped the field of black studies was when you had programs that went out and recruited and educated a mass number of students, or a critical number of students.

So, I don't think that everybody's Chicano studies. If this is Chicano studies, and then at Columbia, they just started one that has maybe three people, can you equate the two as being equal in Chicano studies? And I'm just saying that Chicano studies is then the melding of different knowledge. A student here can come in here and get a background of language in Nahuatl, language in Mayan; they can then go on and get their history classes; they can then go on and get their literature classes; and so when they come out, that is a major in Chicano studies. But you go into some of the schools and you have a person that's taking a class in Chicano history, and saying, "I'm a Chicano studies major." Are they a Chicano studies expert? No, they're what? They have one field in the discipline of history, that's all.

So you would just have to break it down. These are the contradictions we had to go through with the committees here. They said, "Well, it's Chicano because we have a class in Mexico, and Chicano, Mexican American in history, that's Chicano studies." No it's not Chicano studies. They're history classes, so there's a difference. This is the Jesuit in me.

02-01:14:10

Holmes: [laughs] Well, another interesting aspect that you've discussed, particularly in evaluating the evolution of Chicano studies, is in the beginning you've said that the program should not only be student focused but that the students, as

well as faculty, should also maintain connections with the community. Discuss that a little bit, and how you've seen that change.

02-01:14:42

Acuña:

Much less so, but let's say for example, age changes you. That's why I say that I go through Facebook more, because I can't travel as much. Every time I go and take a speaking engagement, my wife has to drive me there. That's a tremendous imposition on her. So consequently then, I have to, for my knowledge, I have to go to what? I have to go to the Internet. I have to go to more journalistic articles. I have to go to an awful lot more on what is happening, what people are talking about, because you want to know what people are talking about. How can I write about youth if I don't know what they're talking about? I love the Millennials, because they're thinking. They were against Hillary [Clinton] because what? Ecuador. They were against Hillary because of Honduras. They were against Hillary because of Libya. This is what they're talking about. Now how can I know what they're talking about if I don't use these type of methods?

I travel an awful lot through the city, and the city is changing with gentrification, and gentrification is taking on a different quality in each one. I have to see it firsthand. I'm like Doubting Thomas: I want to touch the wounds; I want to see what they are. And so consequently, you know, a lot of other people are that way. You find an awful lot of other people that are that way.

02-01:16:35

Holmes:

In regards to topics within the field as it has evolved, one of the biggest, which you kind of hit on, was the diversification of the field, the inclusion of women, and equity within the community but also within the field. Discuss your experience on that.

02-01:16:59

Acuña:

Well I think it's just like the whole field, it's spotty, but you have people like Emma Pérez, that's who I was trying to think about earlier. Emma Pérez has a beautiful mind, and she's always searching. You have others that, like, some of my friends are talking about their grandmothers. It's still evolving. Hopefully one of these days, we'll have not a Gloria Steinem, but we'll have a Lerner, or a Fox, Elizabeth Fox. They really think, and I think that they're good, but that comes with maturation. That comes with maturation.

Also too, what you really is the sophistication of the woman question. Thirty years ago, there would have been almost a revolution in support of Hillary. Today a lot of women, what? They question the neo-liberalism of the Clintons. They question whether she would've been a good choice, because they're looking into the background. Well, same thing with the literature. It's up and down. It's a rollercoaster.

02-01:18:39

Holmes:

Another new field, again, that we were just talking about, the borderlands. How did you see this literature developing versus early pioneers of looking at the border experience, such as David Weber and yourself?

02-01:18:56

Acuña:

I never liked Weber that much, but that's just me. I thought David rationalized the system too much. He apologized for the system. I think it's just, again, evolving. I had hopes for the ASU program, but now when you start to look at the catalog, et cetera, they don't have very many senior scholars. It doesn't seem like it's really being proactive. But look, how influential can scholars be in a topic? I mean, what does Santa Barbara have now, about five professors in Chicano studies? And those five professors probably only teach two classes or three classes a year in Chicano studies. So consequently, how influential can they be? So it's an awful lot to ask of them, and it's also very presumptuous to think that they're going to be influential.

02-01:20:08

Holmes:

Lastly, if we look at the field was developing in the 1990s, immigration became a very important topic and a hot topic that I think was seen in new ways than it had perhaps previously, and some of this most likely had—

02-01:20:27

Acuña:

No, but—excuse me, just a correction. I think that really started to happen, started in the 1970s—

02-01:20:35

Holmes:

On immigration.

02-01:20:36

Acuña:

Yeah, immigration. The 1980s bring in about a million Mexicans, and about a million Central Americans.

02-01:20:46

Holmes:

Mm-hmm, especially with the 1986 act, yeah.

02-01:20:49

Acuña:

No, but they bring in, just immigrate, with documents, without documents, not distinguishing there. By the 1990s, you have a certain maturation. You start having this community becoming proactive. So consequently, it's something that has come slow and it also is situational.

In California what really pushes the immigrant is that light industry starts to move into Los Angeles, and you have a decline of heavy industry. Well, most of the union members that come in, in light industry, are going to be immigrants. Your union heads then become or are second-generation Mexicans who are very pro immigrants. By the late seventies, you have people like María Elena Durazo that are becoming heads of locals and then heads of the federation. They wed the immigrant with the labor movement, labor movement who was now what? Anti-immigrant becomes all of a sudden

pro immigrant because most of their rank and file are immigrants. So there's a phenomenon there that's very important. It just doesn't happen. It was the numbers that start to change it; the membership starts to change it.

02-01:22:47

Holmes: Well, what I was referring to was also the rise of literature within the field on immigration in the nineties.

02-01:22:55

Acuña: But how much literature is produced, in relationship then to the immigrants themselves? You see.

02-01:23:05

Holmes: That's an interesting point.

02-01:23:05

Acuña: And we even have to talk—I think the 1986 amnesty law hurt us an awful lot, because it gave money to two of the prime Chicano organizations to educate the new immigrant. It came into the billions of dollars. This changed those organizations. They became teaching or they became education institutions instead of being proactive.

02-01:23:44

Holmes: Well I wanted to get also get your thoughts, because really, looking at the 1990s, the politics, at least here in California and elsewhere, begin to also change regarding immigration, such as Prop 187—

02-01:23:58

Acuña: Well, before that is the term limits, which bring in a critical number of Chicano elected officials. Well we then start to control the Democratic Caucus. You have a change of other people. Also the '94 and '96 and '98 elections start to change the direction, and they change the direction out of self-interest. Numbers.

02-01:24:37

Holmes: Well during this time, hunger strikes were needed on campuses again. A new level of activism began, not just against Proposition 187 or Proposition 209 in California, but also on college campuses too, in some cases, questioning the administration's support.

02-01:25:04

Acuña: But that starts in the eighties.

02-01:25:07

Holmes: Really?

02-01:25:08

Acuña: Most, or the two leaders there, is Minnie Ferguson and Marcos Aguilar. They had been active with the Mothers of East LA. She wrote the premier work, Mary Pardo, on the Mothers of East LA, and they were active in that

community. This hits then with the '94 act, Proposition 187; it leads into it. Well, they walk out because they can't get Chicano studies. But the importance there is that the schools had changed. Now you had a critical number in about ten to twenty Los Angeles City Schools. When you had the hunger strike, it shakes up things, because the high school students, in support, start to walk out. You have a critical number there. They can bring LA to its knees. And for the first time, you see the power in the number of students. They had much more power than they did in '68, because if they all walk out, they would walk out from LA to San Fernando, the entire basin. So consequently, it's again, that growth in numbers that happens during the 1990s.

Also, there's a change. Remember, the students were under assault with the Bradford decision, of the UC, that now they're going to charge them what? Tuition. In the 1990s, the Los Angeles DA was talking about bringing charges against me, because we had a lot of undocumented here on this campus. Today we still, we almost have a thousand DACA students on campus, which is an awful lot. We openly were defying the law. We're bringing them in, putting them in our classes, et cetera. If it's an amoral law, good Catholicism, you have the obligation to what? To defy it. So you see, there was just a change, but numbers were important. Numbers were important.

02-01:27:45

Holmes:

And how did you also see that these numbers, in thinking about it that way, also helped this maturation and this growth of Chicano studies? Did you see that correlation as well?

02-01:27:56

Acuña:

Oh yeah. Those numbers, I mean, how did we grow from six professors all the way to all of the professors that we have today? How did we grow from around seventy-five students, in 1969, today where we have what, eleven, 12,000? You don't think that the administration reads the same numbers that I do?

02-01:28:29

Holmes:

Well, during this time too, did you also see that, with the rising numbers, even nationwide, that you saw a proliferation of Chicano studies departments?

02-01:28:42

Acuña:

Well, now, remember, what is a department? Most of them—

02-01:28:46

Holmes:

Are programs.

02-01:28:47

Acuña:

Yes—are programs. There's an awful lot of difference, because if I'm in a program, my locus of tenure is where?

02-01:28:59

Holmes: Some other department.

02-01:29:00

Acuña: Some other department.

02-01:29:04

Holmes: I wanted to talk a little bit about some of your later scholarship, but I also wanted to touch on that, during the same time in the eighties and nineties, you became a contract journalist with a few newspapers here in the area. Can you discuss that experience, and was it also that drive as you were just explaining with social media, of an expanded audience, to discuss those kind of issues?

02-01:29:30

Acuña: Well, this was before social media. In 1965, I was put on the cover of the *LA Weekly*. And so, it gave me an awful lot of notoriety. I got into a fight with the chancellor of the university over her proposal to raise the standards of the CSU. Well, the *Herald Examiner* is going broke, so they wanted to boost circulation so they put me on, and so I started writing for them. It was a hard transition. Then, they went broke in '69, so then I started writing for the *LA Times*. All this time I'm writing also for *La Opinión*, which had a bigger circulation than most local newspapers, and I'm just writing about what? The incinerators in East Los Angeles, the waste, the Mothers of East LA, different topics. So I wrote about them.

Last job, when I started suing the University of California—University of California is powerful, and even the judges are alumni of it, or they know the chancellor or the vice chancellor. So that was happening there, so, they put pressure on the *LA Times*, and the *LA Times* pulled me. They told me I was either going to tone it down—because they told me, "Well," he says, "you're lying because you said; how do we know that you're not lying by the saying that Bloody Christmas happened with the police?" So I'm not going to put up with that shit. So then I went to El Salvador in '91. I got my credentials through the *Texas Observer*. Well, I thought that that would be a cover because Texas is conservative, but the *Texas Observer*, Jim Hightower and all of these people, that's the Left. So I went down there. When I got back, I wrote two books in succession: *Anything but Mexican*, and *Sometimes There Is No Other Side*.

02-01:32:11

Holmes: Well let's discuss those. The first, *Anything but Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles*, and this came out in 1996, which a lot of reviewers praised it as real, scholarly analysis and look at the contemporary struggles in LA faced by Chicano and Latino communities. So was it your journalism, or your work for the newspapers that really kind of formed the basis and genesis of that work?

- 02-01:32:45
Acuña: Yeah, and an awful lot of it. I, by this time, learn the value of articles. *A Community Under Siege*, then this, you know; newspaper articles really make up history. They're what?
- 02-01:33:05
Holmes: Oh, here, hold on a second; let me fix your microphone real quick.
- 02-01:33:12
Acuña: Actually, can we take a quick break.
- 02-01:33:14
Holmes: Yeah, of course. [audio stops, restarts]
- All right, well we're back, and Rudy, before we took our break, we were talking about, we just finished up discussing your writing in journalism, and how that came together and inspired your two works, *Anything but Mexican*, and *Sometimes There Is No Other Side*.
- 02-01:33:42
Acuña: Well, in those two, you know, like *Anything but Mexican*, it's a combination of that, and also my own experiences, because I used the El Cholo, that was a restaurant that started here in LA, the oldest Mexican restaurant in LA in the 1920s, and it has a big sign, and it says "El Cholo," which is Mexican, and then it says "Spanish food." We're really made compatible by Anglicizing it. And so, what the journalism thing is that I started to get the symbolism more, but it really helps me to write fast. You write real fast, too fast. But it's not academic writing.
- Now *Sometimes There Is No Side* comes from the Santa Barbara fight. Now that was a hard fight. The UC spent about \$10 million trying to bury me in litigation. They had me for five days with a psychiatrist, trying to prove I was crazy. They said, "You're paranoid." I said, "Shit yes, I'm paranoid!" I said, "I'm in debt for a million dollars, fighting you. You're trying to assassinate my character. Yeah, I'm paranoid!"
- 02-01:35:20
Holmes: Now, this stemmed from, there was a job opening there that you applied for, is that correct?
- 02-01:35:27
Acuña: Well, my wife was approached by—because they want to move me, they went through my wife, and Benny Torres, who was the chair of the Congreso, which was the student group up there, came over to the house and wanted to talk her into it and me into it to put in for a job there. So I did put in for a job, and I didn't think I was going to get it, but I, you know, just to get my wife off my back. And, she had had cancer, as I said; she had had ovarian cancer, and so she was still shook. She was shook up by the earthquake here, and so she wanted to get away.

So, I put in for the job, and they voted; the first committee in the department voted for me. Then it got into the upper echelons, and they said, "Well, how can you hire him? He wrote *Occupied America*. He's not a good scholar because he lied, because he's talking about the United States invaded Mexico." And I have all of the transcripts. I will send you one of the articles if you want. And so, they went after me, and they then revoked it. Some of the Chicanos backed them. There was a little bit of fear for me coming in, because they thought I was going to control everything. And the chair, Yolanda Broyles-González, backed me. She was the one who was also talking me into applying. Well, to make a long story short, it started a big fight. I had documents where Mario [García], and this is why I'm a little bit pissed off at him, Mario was collaborating with the UC. And so consequently, I write that in the book. They were collaborating, and Ramón Gutiérrez from UC San Diego was collaborating with them.

All of it came out of a certain amount of jealousy, and probably, a certain amount of fear that was probably valid. I had an awful lot of support in that community, and among students. One day afterwards I walked on that campus, I had almost total student support. Now that's terrifying to other faculty members, especially when they're under siege, and the students say that they don't do anything. The community was in support. I had the other support here in LA with the union movement. I've always been strong in the unions, so they came up with facilities; they came up with money; they came up with support. I got myself fifteen lawyers. Didn't pay them; they were all pro bono. They had never done a lawsuit. The only thing that kept them together is the crusade, being for what? Chicano.

And so we took on the UC. I never realized that I'd rather do business with the Mafia than I would with the UC. One day a man called me up from San Diego. His wife had problems, and he wanted to commit suicide. I kept him on the phone for about three hours, talked him out of the suicide. What happened was that to break his wife, and to get her off suit, the UC spread the rumor that he had molested his kids. And this is devastating to a father, and he wanted to commit suicide. I said, "You're doing what they want you to do. Don't commit suicide." And we went boom, boom; we talked. But then I said to myself, how in the hell can people be this way? How can they be this, I don't know, insensitive or de-human? This is something that you don't do to people.

But we beat them! And we beat them, you know how? The judge was on their side, and the judge, the federal judge, Audrey Collins, kept on ruling in their favor, but when the jury selection came, I knew that I had won, because six out of the eight people were minorities. That rarely happens in a federal court. And I said, I have it. I have it. They'll understand my story, my narrative. My lawyers made an awful lot of mistakes, but we won, and that was then, *Sometimes There's No Other Side*. It was all of that what? Experience that we had there in that particular case.

02-01:41:18

Holmes:

Well and it reminds me of a work that came out, a collection of essays on truth and objectivity that came out the year before that, which I saw as kind of a parallel.¹

02-01:41:31

Acuña:

Yeah and I quoted, I recorded one of the guys, I think the editor or the author; it was on truth and objectivity. One of the cases was that the case of Schlesinger when he did his letters of recommendation, he wrote that "the applicant was a Jew, but not an obnoxious kind of Jew." And I did, I was influenced by that work. The only thing is, my facts were different, but the work definitely influenced me.

02-01:42:09

Holmes:

And in that work, you use your case to actually expand further to, in a sense, critique this American paradigm that everything's fair and equal, and then that you would show that no, there's downsides to that that we don't always acknowledge.

02-01:42:23

Acuña:

The downside, yeah, and the money, the power of money. So this was a different kind of story, which I use again, personal activism. In most of the things that I write about, I have personally been active or know the case. If I'm writing about Texas and the walkouts, I'm talking to people that were active in it. And sometimes in *No Other Side*, I'm a protagonist in it.

02-01:43:01

Holmes:

I wanted to then move to your work that came out in 2007, *Corridors of Migration*. Now this is based on about thirty years of research that went into other books—

02-01:43:14

Acuña:

Forty years, yeah.

02-01:43:16

Holmes:

—and it's a detailed study of migrant labor activism in Northern Mexico and the Southwest from 1600 to 1933. Discuss the genesis of this project. I guess at a certain point in your career, you're pulling a lot of the ideas and resources into one work?

02-01:43:39

Acuña:

Well, it started about '72, '73, and I just wanted to get out of the house. Sometimes when you're having a lot of trouble, you want to just get away. So I started driving up to the San Joaquin Valley and I read about the—what was it—the 1933 cotton strike, and it really hit me. I mean, all of those people, it was three people that were shot down, the nine babies that starved to death. So I wanted to find out a little bit more, especially since the Communists were

¹ Rodolfo Acuña, *Truth and Objectivity and Chicano History* (1997)

saying that they took the people to a higher level, but the other people were saying no, that they agitated the Mexican; the Mexican was a good person who was agitated by the Communists. So I wanted to find out the real truth.

So I went up there and I started doing interviews, and I had the interviews in here, of all of these farmers, et cetera. And one time I drove into a farm and I saw they got these big dogs and everything. I was going, "Shit!" I said, "What in the hellfire am I doing here?" Good thing I was lighter, because, you know, and then they start talking. I started talking to the farmer who says, "You're not with that Cesar guy are you?" "No. Oh no." I showed him *The Story of the Mexican Americans*. "I write children's books." And so we started talking, and he was talking about Mexicans like they weren't human beings.

So I started interviewing up there. Then I ran across a person by the name of Pedro Subia. He was one of the people that was killed at Pixley. They shot him down, I think. No, not at Pixley. He was the one that was shot in Arvin. And I started looking into it. Well, I started working with the census, and I saw that he came from Clifton-Morenci. Clifton-Morenci was one of the centers of the copper strikers. And so consequently, I says, "He must have been exposed to labor activism if he was there. The Wobblies were very active there." So I started just piecing it together, then I started looking at who his neighbors were.

Then I went back to the records, the 1900 census, and the other censuses. Then I see that also Abrán Salcido had been there, and Abrán Salcido was from Camargo. He was one of the guys that was jailed after the 1903, and then he was killed by the Porfiristas. He did an awful lot of union organizing there. Práxedes Guerrero had been there. Well you know, Camargo's not the biggest city. Then I find out that Pedro Subia is from Camargo. Now, if Salcido, and they were from the same little town—Camargo is not New York City. So I said, "No, they must have known each other."

So, nobody took the Mexicans to a higher level of consciousness. They already had that conscious through struggle. Then I started looking more, started piecing more. Now, it was not what? Mexican workers; it was Mexican laborers, you see, in the subtitle, Mexican laborers. There's a subtle difference there.

02-01:47:43
Holmes:

That's interesting. Well, then, to finish up on some of your writing, you also began to publish a blog using social media again trying to get to a larger audience. Discuss how that kind of came about, and how that's developed over the years.

02-01:48:07
Acuña:

Well, look, when I started getting stopped by the *LA Times*—even *La Opinión* turned on me, finally—I said, "No, I'm going to get my voice out there," and

that's when I started just writing and sending things out. I have a mailing list of about 5,000 emails. Well now then went to Facebook, that has another 5,000 friends. That's 10,000, a nucleus. That's more than I get even in the newspapers. And so consequently, that's when I started doing it. Some, most of it is, people say, "Oh, you've got a bug up your ass." Well, yeah, that's my bug, that you're not free. You want to be free, and the only way you can be free is to talk out. And so this is why I did that.

02-01:49:13

Holmes:

Well, here in the time we have remaining, I wanted to have you reflect a little bit on the evolution and future of Chicana/o studies, the rise of ethnic studies departments, as well as other programs that we've seen here over the years. How do you see the relationship between your more core departments, say like a history department, with your Chicano studies departments?

02-01:49:48

Acuña:

Well, the history department's a job. They get it basically for a job. You go and teach, not because you like the place, but because it will give you a job and pay you a salary, give you health benefits. So I think there will always be those kind of jobs. There will always be people who believe that this is one of the core disciplines, and so it should be taught. Chicano, an awful lot will depend on the evolution. One of the things is, talking about generations, the present generation is not so much Chicano oriented. Also the term "Chicano," I was one of the people that did not vote against changing the name from Mexican American to Chicano, because I believed that it was essential to have Mexican into the identification. Once I was outvoted, I went along with it. But you start to look at it, and why should the immigrants identify with a term that in Mexico is a derogatory term? My father used to say, "*Chicano, Chicano, no. No soy Chicano; soy Mexicano.*" He was a Mexican.

With the immigrant now, we can blame the government, we can blame the corporations for changing our identifications, but you also have to look at the immigrant. The immigrant never identified with it. But Chicanos that write about the Chicano Movement et cetera, I always ask, "What the hell have you done since that time? What have you done since that book?" Because we've done a lousy job of telling the immigrants, whether they be Mexican or whether they be Central American, what the Chicanos have done for them. You look at the Cisneros case, 1971. It did an awful lot for them, because it identified us as an identifiable minority that was entitled to all of the court decisions, et cetera. That's a fantastic legacy. But what have we done to promote that legacy? Well I've tried by going on newspapers, by doing a blog, by getting it out there, fighting the term "Hispanic," fighting the term "Latino," because after all, Latino was invented by Napoleon III, and that was to subvert the Mexican government.

So I look at it, and I don't know. It depends an awful lot on what? The present leadership of Chicano studies. A lot of them are good, like Gabriel, but there

are an awful lot of them that are clueless. They're clueless. They're writing in translation. They're writing what other people experience; they're not experiencing it. In order for you to start to experience something, you have to be involved in it. I took on certain issues, like I took the gay issue on because you know, to me, when I saw what was happening when they got AIDS and mothers were abandoning their sons, I thought that was terrible. How can anybody abandon their sons? How can anybody abandon their daughters? So, that hit me personally. It hit me right here, more than intellectually.

So I'm just saying is that it just depends on the current leadership, where they take it. I think that it can be very viable. I think that the ASU was good because it went into trans-border, because I think that we have to think about the changes or the ideas brought in from Mexico and the ideas that we're sending back there. This becomes important. But, it also depends on the conduits, and the conduits are the professors.

02-01:54:48
Holmes:

In thinking, as you mentioned, thinking of AIDS and sexuality, the field not only diversified to include Chicana history, and really doing that within the name, but now even recently, as with the issue of sexuality and identity arising, we've taken to using the name Chicanx—

02-01:55:15
Acuña:

Which I don't believe in, and I'll tell you why. I think that you have to change institutionally. If you want to change the thought in that, on programs like this, you hire more. You hire more. You mentor more gays. You change it institutionally. You don't do it with a name change. You do it by your action, by really changing that institution.

02-01:55:46
Holmes:

Are you saying that, in some ways, just changing the name is an artificial kind of Band-Aid without really addressing the issue itself?

02-01:55:52
Acuña:

Yeah, and it also makes you feel good, that you're with something, and I don't think that that's right. You know, of the last ten chairs of MEChA, the student group, about four were gay or lesbian. That shows a change; that shows an institutional group change. That would not have happened in 1970. And I look back, and I look at certain student leaders; they're the ones that changed it. And this is what I want to see. I want to see more change. Well now we have an awful lot of the blowouts, a lot of material on the blowouts. You have it in museums. But should history be in a museum? I mean, what has happened? Where are the leaders? What have they done? Where are the people right now that are getting honorariums for going around speaking about the blowouts, or speaking about other things that happened in history? And so, I just have a different perspective. I'm not an intellectual; I just think about things.

- 02-01:57:16
Holmes: I think there are probably many who would argue that you *are* an intellectual, Rudy.
- 02-01:57:22
Acuña: No, no. I don't—
- 02-01:57:23
Holmes: You don't see yourself as that?
- 02-01:57:24
Acuña: No, I don't see myself as that. Then I would have to be like them. [laughter] There's a thing—many times the Indian leaders, and the missionaries is coming; they says, "Are you going to convert before you die so you can go to heaven?" And the Indian leader would tell him, "Are white people going to be in heaven?" They said, "Yeah." He said, "No I don't want to go there." And the thing is that I don't want to go to the same heaven as they do. I don't want to be a bad fuck.
- 02-01:58:08
Holmes: I want to talk a little bit about activism in the field, because this was very important in founding the field of Chicana/o studies. What are your observations of how activism has continued to influence the field?
- 02-01:58:26
Acuña: Well, I think that right now, they're going into spirituality. I think that that's been influenced by students. I'm not being a materialist; I'm not very much for it, but I see the need to study it, and so I think that is changing things. I think that things were changed by critical thinking. There are an awful lot of areas that have been changed through demand, you see, through demand.
- 02-01:59:02
Holmes: You know, this has been, which I think you've experienced, a source of tension in academia, in some ways, that the ideal of objectivity. As a Mexican American historian, you're supposed to be objective and just report and not be active in the community. Now you've disagreed with that premise in some respects. Do you see that tension still there today?
- 02-01:59:34
Acuña: Oh yeah. Let's say for example, being very honest, with the body of work that I have, et cetera, I shouldn't have had any problems. With my knowledge of curriculum et cetera, I shouldn't have had any opposition to go into let's say a research institution. But it's been there, mostly because of me, and I accept this because I accepted this when I did become an activist. I accepted that jacket. And so consequently, it's life.
- 02-02:00:18
Holmes: Well, the interesting thing is, that activism is also a two-way street, meaning in 2011, the state of Arizona banned your book, *Occupied America*, which

some could say is not really a result of your activism per se as much as activism on their part.

02-02:00:42

Acuña:

Well, I think that they're reacting to the nation—that their judgments are being formed by the title, you know. I just wrote another book that's been published, on the erasure of the Mexican American's historical memory. In a way, they wanted to erase our historical memory. Now, how can they do this? They can only do this if they erase our history. They also banned Paulo Freire's work. They also banned an awful lot of others. This is mind control. And so consequently, no, I think that they had something on purpose, because you look at Arizona. Right now the prison industry has been what? Has been privatized. How can you keep it stocked with prisoners, so they can get more money? By that. How can you keep Mexicans down? By erasing their history. It's all economic.

02-02:02:07

Holmes:

Now, in the development of the field, and we see this in history—we've seen this in a few other fields—they start taking a critical look at say, past leaders. In US history, they've not only done this with presidents, but also with figures such as Martin Luther King and others. Chicano history has also seen this in the recent works on Cesar Chavez. What are your thoughts on this?

02-02:02:45

Acuña:

I don't like none of the work that's come out on Cesar, because it's icon bashing.

02-02:02:50

Holmes:

Discuss what you mean by that, because I've read a blog that you wrote—

02-02:02:54

Acuña:

Icon bashing is just that you look at the icon and you get notoriety by presuming that you're bringing in new knowledge, and that you're blasting that person. Whether it's true or not doesn't matter. They did the same thing with Ruben Salazar. There was some work in progress that was saying that Ruben Salazar was a drunk and he was a womanizer. Well, so was George Washington. Thomas Jefferson was a pedophile. I don't think it has any particular purpose. That has more purpose than Ruben Salazar drinking. But people do that.

And then people like rumors. I've had an awful lot of rumors about me, that I was for this, I was for that, when this is not true. I had one case where they said that I blocked the feminists from getting tenure. It's not true. The thing is she was blocked because she only had a BA. She had had about a 2.5 GPA. She refused to go on to get her master's. So there were an awful lot of things, and then I didn't make the decision; the students did, and so did the faculty. But people like to believe the worst. In fact, I went before the committee and said, "Hey, promote her. Keep her. I'm going to be blamed for it anyway."

But, people don't want facts. People want to live under illusions. Americans love to live under the illusion that they live in a democracy, and I'm included because I vote. The illusion of what? Inclusion.

Consequently, this is what I worry about, because you're not going to have any progress. You know in Tucson, they won the case finally. After five, six years, they won the case, and, it cost them an awful lot of money. The leader, Sean Arce, was really crucified. He lost his home; he lost his wife. The program [Mexican American studies program] went down, but now after seven years, they say, "Well you're absolved; it was racism." But they're never going to get the program back. There's the illusion there. So we have to start to deal with those things. That's why I took time off and I wrote about it, because I wanted to make a record. There are other records that are being made. The records are important. The truth is important.

02-02:06:14

Holmes:

I wanted to just get your final thoughts here on the future of the field. From say, when you started here, the spring of 1969 to now, you've seen this area of study expand and take off. Has it taken off more than you ever thought it would? And what kind of hurdles do you see for the future?

02-02:06:44

Acuña:

No, no more. It hasn't taken off. I'm disappointed on the progress, in fact, because it doesn't correlate with the numbers. I think that the hope in Chicano studies is to return to our roots, and returning to the roots means, they have to go back to education, the training of teachers. We are losing more teachers than we are producing right now. People don't want to go into education. I would rather produce a teacher than produce a computer technician, or to produce another biologist, or to do another historian, God forbid. We have to get back to education. First of all, education we can influence. If we had the percentage of teachers out there that we do population, we would control education. We would start to control the minds, like the Jesuit said, "Give me your boy, and I'll make a man," because they're just very elementary. Now, I don't think that people want to go into education. Name me five scholars that want to be teachers.

02-02:08:20

Holmes:

It's a good point.

02-02:08:22

Acuña:

And I think that that is the future. I don't think that we have a future if we don't go back to everything. Is the purpose of education to make brokers? But this is what it's doing. It's making us all brokers.

02-02:08:48

Holmes:

Well what changes would you like to see to accomplish that ideal of getting back to the roots?

02-02:08:56

Acuña:

Well first of all, I would start with intelligent administrators which we don't have very many. Neo-liberalism is killing higher education, because it's privatizing it. When I first got here, I could go up to the cafeteria, and the workers there, I knew them by name. They were all Mexican women there making the food, serving the food up there, et cetera. Today we have what? Today we have concessions, franchises. Everything's a franchise today. You look at the book market. Look at *Occupied America*. When it first came out, it cost about \$2.95, \$3.00. Today it's up to about \$100, \$105. Why? Well, number one, they have more editors. You hadn't an editor to piss at in the book industry. Then you have Follett, that controls the bookstores, a monopoly there.

When I first got here, the vending machine people used to be unionized. They then did what? They outsourced the vending machines. When they, the vendor, one of the vending machine suppliers that was there that would fix the machine et cetera, I didn't see him, and about a year later I saw him and he was driving the car from Toyota to our homes. And I told him, I says, "Hey, I haven't seen you at school." He says, "Dr. Acuña," he says, "I used to love that job. I was in the union. I had healthcare." He said, "I had security, I thought. Now all of a sudden, they let me go because they outsourced it." Now his kids, they didn't have a health insurance; he didn't have a job. That's happened across campus.

Our offices are cleaned by homeless people. I don't have anything against the homeless people, but they're brought in by contractors who are making money. We don't know whether our stuff is going to be missing, or whether they're going to do their cleaning, because we don't know. I used to sit there, talk to the janitors, talk about their families. One of the janitors had a home over here in Mission Hills that he bought with the salary that he was making here, but that's been outsourced. Look at the outsourcing that's taking place. The gardeners are all outsourced.

02-02:12:23

Holmes:

Well, and when we see that happening at the university, it's going to trickle down probably to the departments as well.

02-02:12:28

Acuña:

Oh yeah. Well, it already has, the adjunct. Right now, they say, "Well, we've given rights to part-timers, to lecturers," and they call them lecturers instead of adjunct faculty because lecturer sounds more professional. But they're subsisting today; many of our part-timers are adjunct on \$19,000 a year. So I mean, how can they make a living? How can they take part of a community?

02-02:13:05

Holmes:

When we think of the field—and you were proposing to get back to the roots, meaning student focus, of looking at education—what kind of changes within the field, outside of administration, would you—

02-02:13:19

Acuña:

Well no, the first one is get rid of neo-liberalism. Get rid of neo-liberalism. Also, let's get around some of these hoaxes. Our administration right now gets about an extra \$190 million a year by bringing in foreign students and out-of-state students. That money does not come in through the state budget; that money is what? A slush fund for the administrators. Well one thing is that money doesn't lower tuition. They're not lowering tuition; they keep on raising tuition, because that is a golden cow.

Over here, the dorms, they're renting out the dorm rooms for \$900 a bed. That means a suite there—it's supposed to be a suite—is \$360. They used to have kitchens there. Now they're taking the kitchens out because they said that it's a hazard. Well that means that they have to buy a what? A meal card, and that's going to cost them another \$3,600. Now, those dorms were built with student money. The parking structures out here, the students have to pay three times more than the faculty does. Why? Because the faculty has to vote for parking structures for them to pay parking structures.

02-02:14:58

Holmes:

The students don't get a vote.

02-02:15:00

Acuña:

No, they don't get a vote, because they voted through the student council over there, the student government. The student government is controlled by the frats, you know, only about 3 percent, 4 percent of the student population. They do anything that the administration wants. Look at those things. Those things are the things that are important, because we can talk about the academics changing, but it is not going to change until we start to democratize it for students.

02-02:15:37

Holmes:

That's a good point. In each of these interviews, I want to give people some space to perhaps discuss some of those in the field, some maybe advisors, mentors, colleagues, that have passed, that were there in those early years, but that unfortunately, we're not able to interview for this project. Are there any of those that you would like to mention?

02-02:16:09

Acuña:

I would say that there were some scholars. I said Manuel Servin was a scholar, but, he wasn't really directly instrumental to Chicano studies. He was concerned with advancing the education of Mexican Americans and instrumental in graduating a number of Chicana/o PhDs. I think Ramón Ruiz was a giant in our academic evolution, but he was not active in the making of Chicano studies. I have tremendous respect for Don Ramón. Don Ramón testified for me in the case against UCSB, against the UC, which he was an employee. I think that those two stand out there. I think there are an awful lot of other little people. I think that I named Carlos Vélez-Ibáñez. However, he

had a different perspective than I did. Come from the same roots; his family was from Magdalena, Sonora.

But I think that no, I can't name very many that were really within Chicano studies, because most of them were in disciplines. This kind of distanced them from Chicano studies. I can name more people that probably left Chicano studies, that were instrumental at first. But, I think, I just think it doesn't really matter who did what. What matters is the outcome: Where are we going?

02-02:18:37

Holmes:

Well, any final thoughts, Rudy, before we close for today?

02-02:18:40

Acuña:

No, I think that your journey is a good one. However, I do think that it's going to be a hard one. But, just the picking out of who your first-generation, second-generation, third-generation scholars, it's very difficult—

02-02:18:58

Holmes:

It is.

02-02:18:59

Acuña:

Because it's like NACCS, they come up with a NACCS Scholar. They say, "Well, the NACCS Scholar is supposed to be excellent in publication, excellent in community service." I'd say very few people met that criteria. I think that Juan Gómez-Quíñones fits that criteria. I think Emilio Zamora from University of Texas, fits it. But there's not too many that fit that criteria. So consequently, you have to really look at it, that first, second, third generation. Your selection is research, scholar heavy. Most of them are from the UC, very few from the state universities, or the colleges. I think that's a weakness. I think also it's a weakness, is that so many are from California. Ignacio Garcia is probably one of the few that are from outside of California.

02-02:20:28

Holmes:

Well we try to diversify, but it is a very difficult process, which was the reason why I put together an advisory council so I didn't have to share that burden all by myself. But yeah, it is something to look at, and particularly as this project unfolds, to supplement as well.

02-02:20:43

Acuña:

Also too, remember that when we make a selection, we usually select somebody that thinks like us. I think it's natural; it's human nature. When white departments select somebody for a job, they usually select somebody that they agree with, somebody that's like them. The same thing within the Chicano community. We're no different. I hope you have David Montejano on it. Montejano is very important. I like David. Don't always agree with him, but I like him, I think he's one of the few very human people. He has that human touch to him. Who were some of the others that you said: Ignacio?

02-02:21:45

Holmes: Ignacio Garcia, Richard Griswold del Castillo—

02-02:21:49

Acuña: Del Castillo's another very nice person. Scholarship-wise, he's made more of an impact than most people. Maybe his personality keeps him from being a real activist, what we call a real activism, but he's always active, and he's always supportive of activist causes. I think that's a very good selection.

02-02:22:18

Holmes: I can share the list with you; I think I sent it to you, but yeah, we can go over it, and I'd love your thoughts on that.

02-02:22:23

Acuña: Yeah, because Del Castillo is very good, his work on the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo is undervalued. His body of scholarship is good. I like him an awful lot. He's a gentleman, also, very much of a gentleman.

02-02:22:56

Holmes: Well Rudy, this has been wonderful. I thank you so much for your time and your contributions.

02-02:23:02

Acuña: Well, I'm sorry that my voice is not what it used to be.

02-02:23:07

Holmes: Oh, you've done fantastic. You've done great.

02-02:23:10

Acuña: No, the thing is that it's a very important project. Thank you for doing it.

02-02:23:25

Holmes: It's a true pleasure.

[End of Interview]